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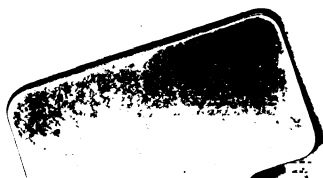
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AN EXPOSITION
OF THE
COUNSEL OF GOD
FOR THE
REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD,
FOR THE USE AND INSTRUCTION OF THE YOUNG.

BY

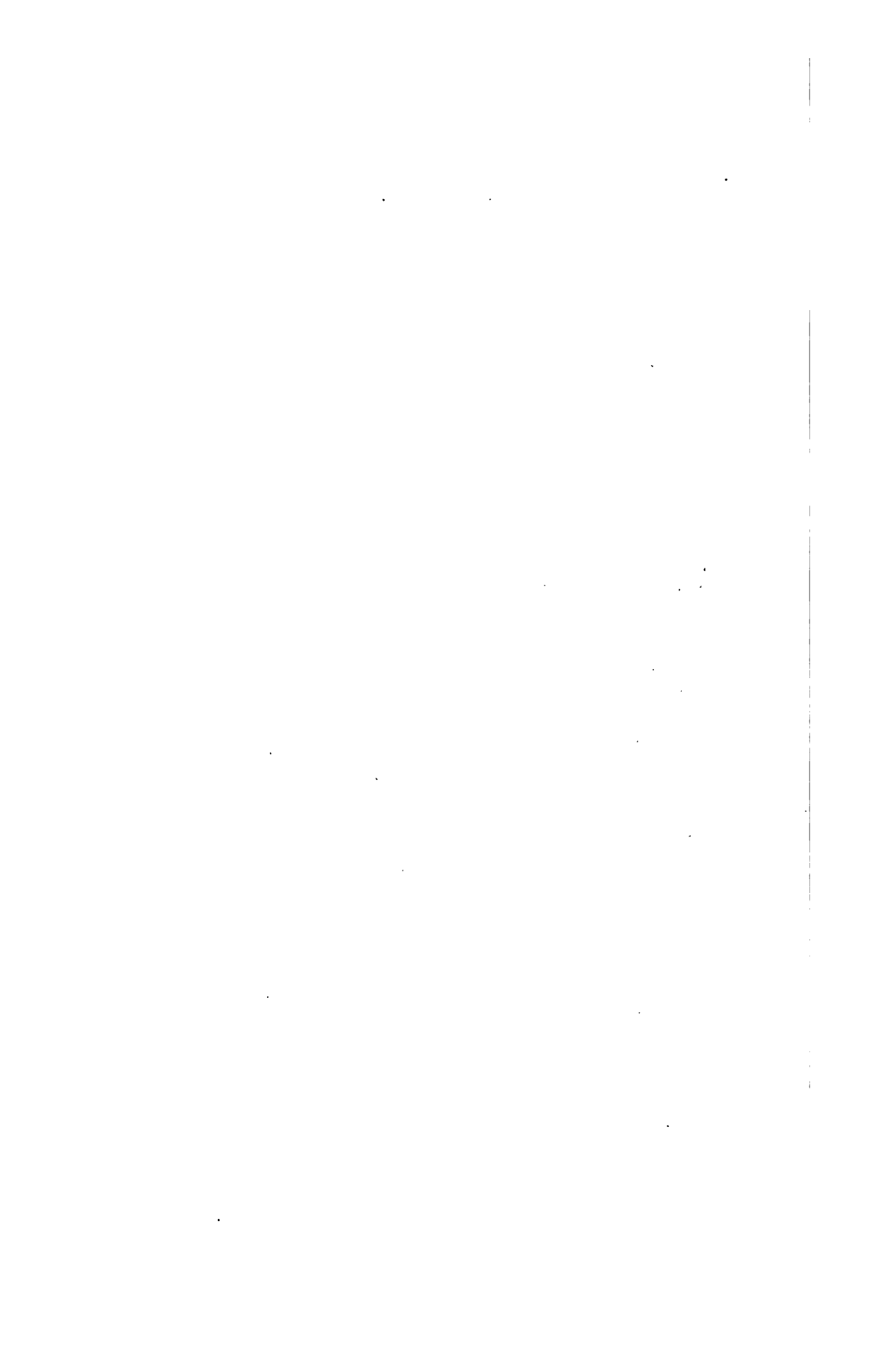
THE VERY REV. ROBERT STEVENS, D.D.
DEAN OF ROCHESTER.



LONDON:
JOHN BOOTH, DUKE STREET, PORTLAND PLACE;
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AND WATERLOO PLACE;
AND W. WILDASH, ROCHESTER.

M.DCCC.XXXVII.

971.



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AN EXPOSITION
OF THE
COUNSEL OF GOD
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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION — GOD ETERNAL, FIRST CAUSE — CREATION OF THE ANGELS; THEIR REBELLION, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES — CREATION OF THIS WORLD AN ETERNAL COUNSEL; REPLY TO OBJECTIONS — ORIGIN OF THE COUNSEL OF GOD FOR THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD; THE FOREORDAINED ECONOMY EXHIBITED — OBJECTION TO CHRIST'S LATE APPEARANCE ANSWERED — OBJECTION FROM THE NUMBERS THAT HAVE NEVER HEARD OF CHRIST, ANSWERED — REFLECTIONS.

INTRODUCTION.

It has been said that Christianity had its origin in human artifice practising upon the credulity of mankind; and that all attempts to trace its existence under any veil or preparatory arrangement before the time of Jesus, are so many

subtle expedients, resorted to for the purpose of attaching the weight and consequence of antiquity to the particular faith in which we have been brought up and educated. To shew the fallacy of this assertion, and to prove the Divine origin of our holy religion, is the design of the following exposition of the counsel of God for the redemption of the world.

In going through this subject in a regular consecutive detail of the leading points, it will, it is hoped, be evinced that the scheme of human redemption is much more ancient, vast, and comprehensive, than is apparent to superficial observation; and that it bears evident marks of being not a contrivance of human ingenuity, but a work of Divine wisdom; not a design first formed in the midst of time by an artful adventurer from interested motives, and for political or secular purposes; but a grand economy of grace, devised by the Almighty before time was for the salvation of the world, embracing all ages while time endures, and destined to arrive at the height of its perfection when time shall be no more.

This Treatise, whose only aim is usefulness, and the advancement of the truth as it is in Jesus, and in which no novelty of explication, or departure from accepted interpretation, is attempted, has been drawn up with all plainness

and brevity, particularly for the information and instruction of the young; that, having before them, in a small compass, a general view of the counsel of God in Christ as developed in both Testaments, they may be induced to take an interest in the study of their religion; which of all studies is the most important, the most necessary, the most satisfying, and the most ennobling; and may feel, while they meditate on the marvellous and merciful operations of the Almighty, the wisdom and advantage of making themselves acquainted with the faith into which they have been baptized, and with the duties and obligations to be discharged, in order to the attainment of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God.

GOD ETERNAL, FIRST CAUSE.

Although, from the infirmity and limited nature of our understanding, we cannot comprehend an eternity past, a duration that never had a beginning; yet our reason, while it is convinced by irresistible evidence and from deduction that there is a God, comes also, through the investigation of cause and effect, to the unavoidable conclusion, that he must have been from everlasting; for it is impossible that there could have been any creation without a pre-existing power to create; and as all created

things must have had a beginning, so the prime cause and author of them, not having been himself created, not having derived his being from any other, must have existed from all eternity.

There is, then, a God, a God eternal. An existence that has been from all eternity exceeds our powers of comprehension. It is a vast and amazing mystery—a mystery above all others the most inaccessible by the intellect or imagination of man—yet, without acknowledging such an existence, reason can find no possible way of accounting for the beginning of things. Hence it follows, that all creation, all matter, and spirit, and life, all things in heaven and earth, and whatsoever else there may be in the immensity of space (and in that space to which we can set no limits, there may be creations out of number), have proceeded solely and exclusively from the will of the one only eternal God, and been fashioned, animated, and informed by his single and almighty power.

This great truth is advanced at the beginning; not only because it is the fundamental principle of true religion, but also because it is deemed right to fix the mind, in the outset of its meditations, upon that point which is the leading article of the Christian creed. Without a belief in God there can be no belief in Christ. And he who sets out with a view to investigate the

truths of the Gospel, will, if he would proceed in a regular course, and in quest of a gradual, consecutive, and connected accumulation of evidence, start from that spot where true religion has laid its foundation. The mind is thus led to the great fountain and spring of all truth, that it may thence proceed, and follow the streams that flow from it.

There is no occasion to labour the proofs of this main doctrine so universally admitted; but it has been deemed right to state and exhibit it at the front and commencement of the argument, as the foundation upon which the superstructure is to be raised. Our acceptance of all the other doctrines of Scripture depends upon the acknowledgment of this prime truth; which is, as it were, the rock that holds fast the first link of that great scriptural chain which extends through all periods of time into eternity. On this rock, therefore, we should firmly take our stand; and thence trace and follow out the mercy and grace of God in the redemption of the world.

CREATION OF THE ANGELS; THEIR REBELLION, AND
ITS CONSEQUENCES.

It is the information of Scripture, that in the eternity past, before the foundation of the

world (how long before we know not), the everlasting God created an order of beings called angels, of a pure, spiritual, and intelligent nature; blessing them with the privilege of holding an immediate communion with him, and endowing them with a large portion of his own happiness. Their dwelling was in heaven; they were the holy servants and ministers of the Most High. They were permitted to draw near and encircle his throne; to behold him in his glorious majesty; and to admire, adore, and magnify the perfections of his nature, and the wonders of his omnipotence.

How some of them, enjoying so great felicity in the very light and presence of their Maker, came to rebel against him; and how it was that pride and ambition entered into spirits so pure and blessed, it would be worse than useless to inquire. Scripture has not given us this information; and we are cautioned against attempting to be wise above what is written. We tread with safety and advantage when we go as far as revelation conducts us; but the moment we advance one step further, we venture upon dangerous ground; and trespassing beyond our prescribed limits, we get entangled to our injury in a maze of difficulties and perplexity. It is disclosed, and man should be content with the knowledge of

the fact, that the rebellion did take place, and that God “spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” *

The fall of man is connected with the fall of the angels. The introduction, therefore, of this subject of their rebellion and its consequences was necessary in an exposition of the counsel of God in Christ. Had Satan and his associates, content with their first estate, remained true to their allegiance, he would never have tempted Adam and Eve to transgress the prohibition of their Maker; and Christ would not have come, had resistance to the wiles of Satan rendered a merciful interference on his part unnecessary. The angels rebelled, and were banished from heaven; their chief seduced our first parents into sin, and made them his captives: therefore, Christ came with power, that he might destroy the works of the devil, and redeem the fallen from their captivity.

CREATION OF THIS WORLD AN ETERNAL COUNSEL :

REPLY TO OBJECTIONS.

Now one of the eternal counsels was the creation of this world. God foresaw and fore-

* 2 Peter, ii. 4.

knew that the man, whom he intended to create a free agent, but with the least possible inducement to abuse his free agency, would fall from uprightness through the unresisted temptation of the chief of the fallen angels. Yet it was his will that this world should be created, and be inhabited by intelligent beings. And what he wills must always be right, how mysterious and incomprehensible soever his motives and determinations may be.

But why, it has inconsiderately been asked, did God, knowing what would happen, create man at all? or, having created him, why permit him to be tempted? Why did he place him in a condition in which he foreknew he would fall? or why did he not create him without the possibility of his falling?

These questions might be met by many reasonable and sufficient arguments; though the difficulty would still remain of fathoming the depths of the Divine counsels. It is deemed wiser and safer, however, to waive these arguments; that disputation may be avoided upon matters which, from their evidently mysterious nature, may be discussed over and over again, without affording satisfaction to the inquirer, or edification to any.

It is enough for us to know, that God created

man, who could not have been created by any other; that man, as he is, is not man as he was, when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; that he did fall from uprightness through the deceit of the serpent, and with his own free consent; that there are evil spirits leagued together for our destruction, and constantly endeavouring to tempt us to sin, that that destruction may fall upon us; and that as God is an all-perfect Being, he has neither done any thing, nor permitted any thing to be done, inconsistent with his foreknowledge, or derogatory from his holy and all-righteous attributes.

If in thus declining to enter the field with the inquirer upon the interrogatories which he has advanced, we be deemed to have suffered a discomfiture, we must leave him to the enjoyment of his imaginary triumph; for we cannot, must not, dare not bring into the contest even the best weapons of reason, if they are to be employed in the rude, unhallowed, and forbidden attempt to rend asunder the veil which the Divine hand keeps suspended between us and the deep things of God.

The above questions savour of impiety; for they imply, at least, a suspicion that all things are not as they ought to be, and that through the fault of God. How much better is it to draw

improvement from facts that are revealed, than to direct the thoughts into that course of inquiry which lies not within the prescribed reach and limits of our powers, and which cannot be pursued without misemploying the energies of the mind, and endangering the best interests of the soul!

ORIGIN OF THE COUNSEL OF GOD FOR THE REDEMPTION OF
THE WORLD. THE FOREORDAINED ECONOMY EXHIBITED.

It is a main point of our convictions, that the redemption of mankind, and the mode of it, were appointed in the Divine councils before the foundation of the world. Would they who disbelieve candidly examine this point—would they seriously consider that the provision of grace was designed before the transgression was committed—and would they studiously trace the mercy of God in Christ Jesus from the eternity in which it was ordained, through all the periods of time in which it has been operating the good of man—they would surely see less reason to be offended at the difficulty of reconciling the foreknowledge of God with the fall of his creatures, and, perhaps, be induced to drop their doubts altogether, and believe. They would then observe, what we consider a grand and peculiar feature of the Christian economy, that it was

owing to this foreknowledge, mysterious as that attribute is, that the means of salvation were provided before favour was lost by disobedience.

The world, it is true, was four thousand years old before Christianity was actually dispensed; but the world was not in being when the gracious design was formed of redeeming man from the wrath and misery into which, through his own fault, he was about to fall. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, mysteriously three persons, but one and the same God, decreed in their eternal council to effect the salvation of mankind through the operations of justice and mercy combined, and acting together so that the latter might pour out its full measure, while the former received its righteous demands; and to deliver them, if they would hear and obey the law which they should know, and the word which should be revealed, from the tyranny of the disobedient angels, into whose bondage they would fall through transgression.

The foreordained economy, as we have been graciously taught, was this:—

In the fulness of time, the time fixed and determined in the Divine mind that looked into futurity, the Son, sent by the Father, was to come in our nature into the world, to teach mankind the righteousness of God, and the way

to eternal life; to recover by a sinless obedience the favour which they would lose; and to redeem them by a spotless sacrifice from the wrath which they would incur. After his departure into heaven to intercede for transgressors by right of merit and with the claims of atonement, the Holy Ghost was to descend from above with a more powerful efficacy than before to carry on the work of truth, of sanctification, of comfort, and of everlasting peace. This act of reconciliation through the Son was to be the act of God himself, clothed with our nature, but void of sin. First, in order that human redemption should be wrought solely and exclusively by divine agency; and, secondly, because man, having become sinful and corrupt, could not recover the favour of God by any meritorious righteousness of his own, nor satisfy his justice by any precious or sufficient atonement.

But, before the coming of the Son of God, various preparations were to be made, and various notices given, that mankind might look forward to it in faith and hope, as the great event that was to reconcile and restore them to God. The promise of a Deliverer, or Saviour by conquest and suffering, was to be made immediately upon the fall. This promise was to be repeated in other terms to some of the faithful.

In process of time a peculiar people was to be selected, among whom the belief and worship of the true God were to be preserved through a special dispensation, and to whom "shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed,"* a law was to be given, under circumstances singularly awful and impressive — a law containing God's holy oracles, intimations of his intended grace, types of his future blessings, and a plain prediction of the coming of a great prophet in Israel, to whom the people were to hearken. And a number of men, chosen of God and inspired by the Holy Ghost, was to arise among them at different periods who, uniting in one remarkable aim and object, should direct the attention of mankind to the coming of the Saviour, promised at the fall and to the fathers; and by a variety of prophecies describe him and his kingdom in a manner so distinct and peculiar, and under so many extraordinary and dissimilar representations, as to render it impossible for any candid or unprejudiced mind to mistake the one or the other, when the fulfilment should take place.

This, as events perfectly according with the word and promises of Scripture have proved,

* Galatians, iii. 23.

was the grand counsel of the Trinity before the beginning of time. This was the remedy provided before the disease was contracted; the latter was foreknown, and, therefore, the former was devised.

If it be admitted that there can be nothing imperfect or limited in the nature and attributes of God, it must be conceded that he foreknew all the events that would take place in the world which he was about to create. But, because he foreknew them, does it necessarily follow that he predetermined they should take place? Certainly not those which were to be the consequences of men's own will and actions. Those events were, indeed, to be subject to his control and government; but they were not to arise out of any absolute decree of his. What, then, did he foreordain? He foreordained that, as certain circumstances foreknown by him should arise, certain dispensations and evidences of grace should be vouchsafed, suited to the times and seasons, calculated to keep alive the knowledge of his name and the memory of his early promise, and manifesting, at every step, the progressive course of his counsels in the redemption of the world.

They who impartially and diligently examine the whole history of mankind down to the pre-

sent moment, will, in seeing as they proceed the consistent and perpetual operations of the Divine counsels, readily acknowledge that too much is not asserted when it is said, that the redemption of mankind, and the mode of it, were appointed in the Divine councils before the foundation of the world. That this is not a mere fancy unsupported by any scriptural warrant, let the words of St. Peter testify: "Forasmuch," wrote he, "as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver or gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."*

The doctrine of the foresight and foreknowledge of God is manifestly taught in these words of the Apostle; for he says that Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world, for the purpose of redeeming it; and, consequently, teaches by a necessary inference that God foresaw and foreknew the events for which this preordination was to provide a remedy. Although grace came by Jesus Christ; that is, the

* 1 Peter, i. 18-20.

full revelation of it in his doctrines and precepts, and the actual accomplishment of it in his life and death, yet its provision was made antecedently to the creation, and the commencement of its operations is to be dated from the early promise of God, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head.

OBJECTION TO CHRIST'S LATE APPEARANCE ANSWERED.

Some have taken offence because Christianity was not dispensed till so late a period of the world, and have declared their difficulty in reconciling this long delay with the infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness of God. They cannot, they say, conceive that he would permit four thousand years to roll away before he sent a Saviour, and thereby cause so many millions of human beings to pass out of life into death in total ignorance of the name and person of him who was to come upon so important a mission, affecting the interests of the whole human race.

But surely they would see that they have no good ground for their offence, if they would consider how old the counsel of redemption is, and reflect that it has been in a state of real operation from the fall of man; that the world, from the beginning of transgression, was taught by God himself to look forward in faith to a

Redeemer to come — that a declension into ignorance of this instruction was owing to men's voluntary departure from the ways of righteousness — that, although Christ did not appear till a late period, his merits and blood have a retrospective, as well as prospective efficacy — and that all good men who lived before his advent, and acted up to the lights and knowledge they possessed, will come in for a participation of those benefits which his life and death have purchased for mankind. “ The coming of Christ when he did,” says Archbishop Secker, “ was no hardship to those who lived before it ; for although his personal appearance was late, yet that does not hinder but the earlier ages may have been greatly the happier for it. We learn, indeed, from Scripture, that there is no salvation in any other ; but we learn also that the salvation procured by him extends from the beginning of time to the end of it ; that as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ; that good persons in the first ages, as well as in the following, were redeemed by his blood who, being foreordained from eternity to be manifested in due time, is therefore in the efficacy of his death the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

OBJECTION FROM THE NUMBERS THAT HAVE NEVER HEARD
OF CHRIST, ANSWERED.

Again it has been objected, that ever since the coming of Christ a large portion of the world has known nothing of him; and that at the present moment, upwards of eighteen hundred years since his birth, there are multitudes in various parts of the globe who have never so much as heard of his name, or having heard of it, have never been instructed in the knowledge of his laws, or in the nature and principles of his faith. These things considered, are there, it is asked, in a counsel thus partial and restricted any proofs or indications of Divine wisdom?

To this objection we reply; we consider that God's covenant embraces the whole world—that Christ “is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe—”* that the grace dispensed by the second Adam extends as far as the mischief occasioned by the first Adam—and that as faith in Christ cannot be expected from those who have never heard of him, or to whom he has not been sufficiently evidenced, there is something which God for his sake will accept in the room of such faith, namely, a virtuous and

* 1 Timothy, iv. 10.

conscientious obedience to the law written in their hearts. "When the Gentiles," says St. Paul, "which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."* And his argument is, that both Jews and Gentiles would be tried by the law which they knew, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ."*

"Without the death of Christ," observes Bishop Horne, "no flesh could have been saved. But who can say to how many or in what different ways the merits of that death may be applied? For his sake the sins may be pardoned of all those who in honesty and uprightness did their best according to the knowledge vouchsafed them during the dispensation under which they lived. He, who holds up his hand at the bar of eternal judgment, will not there be tried by a law which he never knew."

REFLECTIONS.

It has now been shewn that the one only God has existed from all eternity—that at some

* Romans, ii. 14-16.

period of that eternity he created the angels—that some of these angels rebelled against him, and were cast down to hell, and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment—that, although it is impossible for our finite intellects to comprehend the nature and depth of his foreknowledge, it is, no doubt, perfectly reconcileable with the fall of angels and of man—that the redemption of mankind, and the mode of it, were appointed in the Divine councils before the foundation of the world—that the grace, thus foreordained, began to operate as soon as the transgression was committed—that, although Christ did not come till a late period, an early promise of his appearing was vouchsafed, subsequent preparations made for it, and prophetic notices given of it, (as will be more fully shewn hereafter)—and that, although the offering of his righteousness and the shedding of his blood were delayed till the fulness of time, their efficacy, as it reaches forward unto the end, also reaches back unto the beginning, embracing all ages and nations, and extending as far, according to the dispensation under which men live, as the mischiefs of Adam's transgression.

The main object of this chapter has been to

shew that the redemption of mankind was designed by the Almighty before the foundation of the world.

In the following pages it will, it is hoped, be made appear that there was a regular succession of arrangements through a period of four thousand years for the coming of the promised Redeemer; and that those arrangements were so extraordinary in their nature, and so connected together in the promotion of one great design, a design embracing the salvation of the world, and consequently the discomfiture of the wicked angels and the triumphs of a holy God, that they could have been made only by him who alone, seeing through all ages and foreknowing all events, could form, carry on, and mature so vast and complicated a plan, preserving its unity and consistency through numerous generations, and exhibiting it at last, after a growth of so many thousand years, as a work gradually raised to perfection, and displaying the various and distinct marks that were added to it at different times by the Divine hand.

Wonderful indeed and gracious is the Divine counsel for the redemption of the world, as laid open to us in the sacred Scriptures!—and truly wise is he who applies the powers of his mind and the desires of his heart to make himself

acquainted with it; for he will thereby, the more he knows and the further he sees, learn to lift up his soul unto God with increasing thankfulness and gratitude for the mercies he has received, and the blessings which he perceives are in store for him, if he continue steadfast in the faith of Christ and in obedience to his laws. A diligent study of the operations and mercies of God in Christ Jesus, and a frequent meditation upon them in all humility of spirit and teachableness of disposition, and with fervent prayer to be led into all truth, have a direct tendency to enrich the soul, to enlighten the mind, to purify the heart, to elevate the thoughts, to delight the imagination, to clothe the moral man with heavenly attire while he is upon earth, and to prepare him for being invested with the glorious robes of honour in the courts of heaven.

CHAPTER II.

CREATION OF THIS WORLD AND OF MAN—THE TEMPTATION, FALL, FIRST PROMISE—THE CONNEXION OF THIS PROMISE WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST—ITS FULFILMENT IN CHRIST—THE COMPREHENSIVE CHARACTER OF THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST—THE INSTITUTION OF SACRIFICE, AND ITS CONNEXION WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST—REFLECTIONS.

CREATION OF THIS WORLD, AND OF MAN.

IN the foregoing pages it was shewn that the redemption of the world, and the mode of it, were appointed in the Divine councils before the foundation of the world. The economy of preparation is now to be displayed; that economy which forms so distinguishing a feature of our religion, and which from the consistency, dependence, and harmony of its numerous arrangements through so many generations plainly indicates, that it was the design and work of God.

Having decreed that this world should be created, God proceeded, after the fall and punishment of the angels, to put his intention into execution. In six days the mighty work was

completed ; and “the sons of God,” the ministering angels that kept their first estate, contemplating with amazement the operations of the omnipotent Architect, “shouted for joy.”*

Among all the creatures upon earth, wonderful as they were every one of them, two only were made rational and intelligent beings capable of feeling his goodness, admiring his wisdom, and reverencing his power. These he had created in his own image after his own likeness, and having thus constituted them pure and upright in their nature, he placed them in the garden of Eden, and gave them to enjoy therein, in addition to their immediate communion with him, a plenteousness of delights, such as none have been able adequately to conceive since sin entered into the world. He made them, moreover, free agents ; but at the same time afforded them every inducement in the profusion of their enjoyments to continue in their obedience, and left only one way open by which they could fall into transgression. No evil was to happen to them—no knowledge of it was to be admitted into their minds—pain was not to afflict them—sorrow was not to come nigh them—death was to have no power over them—

* Job, xxxviii. 7.

so long as they abstained from eating of the fruit of which he had said unto them, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."*

THE TEMPTATION, FALL, FIRST PROMISE.

Such was the primitive nature and condition of our first parents, altogether pure and every way happy. But too soon all this purity was sullied, all this happiness destroyed. The chief of the fallen angels, whom God permitted to tempt Adam and Eve, but not to control or force them against their will, inflamed with hatred and envy against his Almighty Conqueror, and perceiving that he had made two noble creatures upon earth in a degree resembling the Divine nature, and but a little lower than the angels of light, conceived the malignant design to seduce, if possible, these innocent and upright beings from their allegiance to their Creator, and involve them in his own utter disgrace and ruin. He saw that he had no other way to effect his purpose, than by prevailing upon them through some artifice or other to disregard the prohibition of the Almighty. Too artfully he laid his snare—too

* Genesis, iii. 3.

successfully he wrought his mischief. The woman was beguiled—the man yielded to her solicitation—the forbidden fruit was eaten—and Satan with malicious triumph exulted in the establishment of his power over the rational creatures of God, and in that general defacement both of the natural and moral world, which immediately upon the admission of sin spread itself around.

But in that fatal hour, when man lost the original brightness of his nature, and the high dignity of his character, and brought upon himself the execution of the Divine menace, and the forfeiture of all his former blessings, the Almighty, before he passed sentence upon the disobedient pair, uttered in his denunciation against the serpent that gracious, that comfortable, that ever-memorable promise; “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”*

Now here we have, immediately after the fall, the word of God foreshewing that a particular enmity would subsist between Satan and one born of a woman; and that after a severe conflict, in which mutual bruises would be in-

* Genesis, iii. 15.

flicted, victory would declare on the side of the latter to the destruction of the power of the former.

The circumstances under which this promise was given, evince that it had respect to the coming of a person of great might and of higher power than Satan; a person who, although he himself should suffer in the contest, would nevertheless vanquish the seducer for the sake and deliverance of the seduced; and consequently for the sake and deliverance of those who should be born of their corrupted blood.

THE CONNEXION OF THIS PROMISE WITH THE
COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

A promise of redemption made by the Almighty at such an hour, and immediately after an event the most melancholy on the records of the world, can be considered in no other light than that of a Divine grace vouchsafed to fallen creatures. But it is a fundamental principle of the Gospel that all favour shewn by God to man, whether immediate or remote in its operations, proceeds from the covenant which the Father made with the Son before the world, and can only through the Son be bestowed upon mankind. This early promise, therefore, of

redemption, made before any children were born to transgressors, being a Divine grace in itself pointing to the grant of a future blessing that should deliver the captives from the tyranny of the wicked one, was vouchsafed only for the sake of the Son; and as it evidently pointed to the grace to be in after times revealed and accomplished by Jesus Christ, it cannot be separated from the foreordained purpose of salvation; but must be considered as arising out of it, and as the first intimation of the coming of Christ in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil, and rescue mankind from the obligation to eternal wrath incurred by transgression.

This intimation of a Redeemer was, doubtless, understood by Adam and Eve as a Divine assurance of a victory to be gained over Satan by One whom the Lord should send for that purpose, a victory which should be the cause of deliverance and blessing. The words, however, of the promise, while they afforded the unhappy transgressors a certain degree of consolation, contained a latent mysterious meaning which, although God intended to open and elucidate it more and more by means of prophecy, was not to be exhibited in all its grace and truth to the world till the fulness of time, when the Great Conqueror should appear.

THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE IN CHRIST.

We, who live since the revelation by Jesus Christ, are enabled to see and explain the hidden sense of these words ; “ I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This enmity was that which subsisted between Satan and Christ, between him who in malice and revenge was endeavouring to destroy, and him who in love and mercy was striving to save the whole human race. It comprehends the strong contest in the wilderness, when the wicked one was foiled and overcome ; the continual conflicts when the Holy One dislodged the spirits of darkness from their holds ; the whole system of righteous doctrines and righteous acts counterworking the mischief of evil influence ; and the last great battle for man when Christ, though for the purpose of victory bruised unto death, thereby spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over them upon the cross. In the term, “ the seed of the woman,” there is a marked allusion to the spotless incarnation of Jesus, “ who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary.”

St. Paul writes in one place, “ When the

fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman"*—and in another, "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Christ also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."† In his Epistle to the Romans are these words, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned—therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life; for as by one man's disobedience many" (that is, the many or all) "were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."‡ And in his first Epistle to the Corinthians he declares that, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."§ In these passages there are evident references to the early promise of God to Adam, and a clear illustration both of its hidden meaning, and of the nature, value, and extent of the benefits to

* Galatians, iv. 4.

† Hebrews, ii. 14.

‡ Romans, v. 12-19.

§ 1 Corinthians, xv. 22.

be conferred on mankind by the victorious seed of the woman.

It has been shewn that the redemption of mankind, and the mode of it, were appointed in the Divine councils before the foundation of the world, as a remedy for the evil which God foreknew man would bring upon himself by transgression. And it has now been proved that, immediately upon the fall, a portion of that grace was bestowed in the promise of a Redeemer, mystically termed, the seed of the woman. Hence the position is established, namely, that the grace of God began to operate for the benefit of man, as soon as sin rushed in upon the world.

THE COMPREHENSIVE CHARACTER OF THE COUNSEL OF
GOD IN CHRIST.

God's counsel of redemption is to be considered as one of a very comprehensive nature; a counsel extending from eternity past, through all the periods of time, into eternity to come; a counsel that has for its object the triumph of grace over sin, and the termination of grace in glory; a counsel consisting of promises, prophecies, and revelations, of special providences carrying on the purposes and work of God, of remarkable

preparations for the coming of the Redeemer, of acts performed and sufferings undergone by him for the sake and in the stead of a fallen world, and of all that man is required to believe and obliged to do in order to salvation.

They, who in the consideration of the counsel of God in Christ do not go back to the beginning and before the beginning of time—who do not trace it in its operations from the promise of God to Adam, through the subsequent promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the Mosaic revelation itself, and through all the predictions of the prophets, down to the coming of the Redeemer, and the establishment of his kingdom upon earth—and further, who do not accompany it in its wonderful progress among the Gentiles, and its no less wonderful circulation of benefits, and go with it in thought into futurity, when its glory shall be complete in the happiness of the redeemed—must entertain a very narrow and contracted notion of human redemption by Divine means, and of the gracious Being who came to be “the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.”*

* 1 Timothy, iv. 10.

THE INSTITUTION OF SACRIFICE, AND ITS CONNEXION WITH
THE COUNSEL OF GOD.

The next circumstance in which God's counsel of redemption unfolds itself is, the early institution of sacrifice. Much argument has been employed and talent displayed in order to shew that sacrifice was not originally a Divine appointment; and consequently that Abel's sacrificing of the firstlings of his flock was either an invention of his own, or an act performed after the example of his father the author and introducer of this religious rite. With this opinion, however, few are satisfied. It has neither support to rest upon, nor warrant to give it strength; and it would overturn in one very material point the faith of ages. The silence of Moses as to any command of God in this respect does not prove that no such command was given, nor does it in the least weaken the general conviction that oblations and sacrifices were instituted by God immediately after the fall — oblations, as an acknowledgment of pious gratitude for benefits received — and sacrifices, as an evidence of faith in a vast blessing to come according to promise, even the expiation of sins through the shedding of vicarious blood. The Apostle testifies that

Abel offered his sacrifice by faith;* and as the faith was entertained in consequence of God's word, it is surely reasonable to conclude that sacrifice originated in his express command.

Moses does not say that Adam offered any bloody sacrifice unto the Lord, nor that he made any offering at all; but it should be remembered that he records nothing concerning Adam after his expulsion from Paradise, except that children were born to him, and that he died at the age of 930. He informs us, indeed, that the Lord God made unto Adam and Eve coats of skin; and hence it has been thought that these skins were the skins of beasts slain in sacrifice, as they certainly were not slain for food; but without laying any stress upon this opinion, which, however, seems a very reasonable one, may it not fairly be supposed that Abel offered up a bloody sacrifice, because his father had done so before him? for there is no ground for concluding that this offering of Abel's was the first of the kind that had been made; and if Adam offered up such a sacrifice, we cannot but think that he must have received the instruction and authority of God

* Heb. xi. 4.

for the performance of an act which upon any other ground appears so unaccountable.

Admitting that the Lord might vouchsafe to accept an offering of the fruit of the ground, or of any substance that a man possessed, when such offering was made with a pious heart and a grateful intent, though without a Divine command; yet it is hard to conceive that he would be pleased, how good soever the motive, with a bloody sacrifice, unless such sacrifice had been ordained by himself. Nay, is it not reasonable to think, from the very circumstance of the motive being good, that if the sacrificial act by which blood was spilt and pain inflicted on a harmless animal, especially when animals were not allowed to be killed for food, had been a human invention, God would have forbidden it, and not have shewn, as he did, his approbation of it?

When Noah came out of the ark, “ he took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar”* that he had built. Hence it is evident that such sacrifices were usual before the flood; for Noah would not surely at such an hour and under such circumstances have done this, had he not

* Gen. viii. 20.

known that the offering of such sacrifices was an ancient act acceptable unto the Lord, and acceptable unto him as originating in his express command. And again, is it not reasonable to think that God, when he saw Noah about to shed the blood of animals, would at once have put a stop to such a practice, that it might cease in the new world, and not have sanctioned it, as he did, by his approbation, had it not been pleasing in his sight as a pious act of obedience to his known will, and as the renewal or continuance of a rite so intimately connected with his counsel of mercy in the redemption of the world?

Again, when Abraham was about to slay his son according to the Divine command, by whom was the ram provided? Not by Abraham, but by the Almighty. It was, therefore, the Divine pleasure that the blood of the ram should be shed, and Abraham did shed it in compliance with the evident will of God. Now we cannot conceive that the Lord would have provided a ram purposely for the slaughter, unless there had been in the act of sacrificing and of shedding blood something of an approved religious nature, a rite in fact arising out of the Divine institution. We cannot think that he would have done this, had sacrifice been a mere human invention.

We know that sacrifices formed part of the Mosaic law, not being ordained by that law as a new thing, but sanctioned by it as ancient rites to be continued and observed with more frequency and formality than before, and under certain and defined regulations. This circumstance furnishes us with a very strong presumption in favour of the Divine appointment of those sacrifices which were offered up by holy men before the law from the beginning; for surely God would not have permitted sacrifices to be a part of his new law, had they been used before the giving of that law without an express authority from himself—and considering the manner in which sacrifices had been abused, would he not have abolished them altogether as occasions of offence, had they not been an original institution of his own, and connected with that event of grace and mercy which, according to his counsel, was one day to take place in the world?

God, we know, considers before all things the intents of the heart; and we admit that he might overlook, and even favourably receive an external offering, if not absurd, or unbecoming, or having a tendency to injurious effects, because of the sincerity by which it was dictated, and the devotion with which it was accompanied.

But that Abel should sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock without any Divine command, and entirely from his own or his father's suggestion, and thereby perform an act so representative of that great sacrifice of the Divine Lamb, which was foreordained in the eternal councils to be slain for the sins of the world, seems an opinion so improbable, that we cannot for a moment entertain it.

If it be admitted that Abel's sacrifice was connected with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, it is, we think, more consistent with reason to conclude that God, by whom the latter had been designed before the foundation of the world, issued his authority for the offering up of the former; than that Abel should of his own mind devise, or in imitation of his father's unauthorized example exhibit, a representation of that great propitiatory act which had been foreordained in the eternal councils, and was in the fulness of time to be brought to pass. If it be denied that God instituted sacrifices in the beginning, then Abel's sacrifice must be considered as bearing no allusion to and have no connexion with the foreordained and afterwards completed sacrifice of Christ—or if it be considered as bearing such allusion and having such connexion, and yet to be of human invention,

then comes the necessary conclusion that man, and not God, devised one of the types or figures of the great economy of grace.

Our conviction, therefore, is, that sacrifices were the ordinance of God from the beginning and for the most important purposes; particularly to shew mankind that guilt could not be expiated without the shedding of blood, and to be to them, through ages and generations till the fulness of time, types of that great sacrifice which the seed of the woman would offer up, even the sacrifice of himself, for the sake and in the stead of a fallen world.

In this early promise of a Redeemer, therefore, and in the early institution of sacrifice is to be seen the commencement of that economy of preparation, which forms a part, and so very material a part, of the counsel of redemption; and which we shall find, as we proceed, regularly preserved down to the advent of the Saviour, and the fulfilment of the Divine intentions predicted by various voices, and prefigured by various types through a long succession of ages.

REFLECTIONS.

How highly to be praised and adored is the name of that gracious Being, who suffered not his fallen creatures to be utterly lost and undone

by reason of their transgression ; but gave them in the sad hour of their shame the comfort of hope, and the gratifying promise of a victory to be gained in their behalf over the serpent by the seed of the woman ! At the moment when the law was broken—at the moment when his offended justice demanded the infliction of the severest punishment—at the moment when his wrath was kindled at the first instance of human ingratitude and sin—his mercy stayed the uplifted arm, and pleaded for the guilty ; not for their restoration to their lost dignity and forfeited happiness ; not for an acquittal that would exempt them from all punishment and pain in this life ; not for the remission of their sins unavenged and unexpiated ; but for the suspension of the present deserved condemnation, that they might be placed in a state of trial, and, if they should go through it with faithful, though imperfect, services according to the Divine directions, be altogether forgiven in the end and saved unto life eternal ; saved, not by reason of their righteousness, which could never be so exalted as to claim even a grace from Heaven ; not on account of their sufferings which, how severe soever they might be, could never be deemed an expiation for sin ; but through the operations of that Divine counsel which had

already devised the means of their recovery by a perfect obedience that should merit favour, and a vicarious atonement that should make full satisfaction for them.

In the forbearance, in the gracious declaration of that moment all men are concerned; for then it was that the first sound of good tidings was heard upon earth—then it was that Adam, and in him all his posterity, received the Divine pledge of a future restoration through the blood and bruises of a Redeemer—then it was that the transgressors, bowed down with a sense of sin and shame, were blessed with the assurance that, although all was indeed corrupted, all was not irrecoverably lost. Praised, then, for ever be the God of salvation should every tongue exclaim—praised for ever be the Lamb without blemish and without spot, that was verily fore-ordained before the foundation of the world to be sacrificed for our sins—and praised for ever be the voice that said, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*

But man should not be content with uttering thanksgivings. He should come before God with his offerings and his sacrifices, the offerings of a religious service, and the sacrifices of a

* Luke, xix. 10.

humble and contrite spirit. There is no obligation now to bring unto the Lord either the fruit of the ground as an acknowledgment of pious gratitude for benefits received, nor of the firstlings of our flock as an evidence of faith in blessings to come. The shedding of the blood of bulls and of goats and of lambs is no part of the Christian's duty. When the substance came, the shadows passed away. When the one great propitiatory sacrifice was made, the types of it were no longer to be observed. When precious blood was spilt, representative blood was to be shed no more. What was ordained in anticipation of a great event was to be no longer in force, when that event should be accomplished. In the place of faith in a Redeemer to come upon earth is substituted faith in the Redeemer passed into the heavens. In the room of piety interwoven with and expressed by external oblations is required the free-will offering of the heart, with such formalities only as are necessary to the life and purposes of religion. God is not to be approached with animal sacrifice, but with the sacrifice of the soul; that sacrifice which manifests the contrition of the inner man, which evinces the destruction of the whole body of sin, and which is offered up in faith and spiritual reference to the oblation of the precious blood

of Christ made in the heavenly sanctuary for our peace and salvation. God is to be worshipped with the mind, the soul, the affections, with a godly sorrow, with a faith unfeigned, and with the fruits of obedience unto righteousness. Herein consists the Christian's duty, the peculiar character of the Christian's offering, and the true nature of the Christian's fellowship with the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of mankind. This is the life and essence of religion disencumbered of those ritual observances, which God judged it necessary to impose on former ages, as preservatives of his holy worship, and as symbols of his future mercies, but never as the main part of man's religious service; for God's first demand upon him always was, Give me the communion of thine heart and the integrity of thy life.

CHAPTER III.

THE ECONOMY OF PREPARATION — THE TRANSLATION OF ENOCH — ITS CONNEXION WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST — NOAH'S PREACHING AND SACRIFICE — THEIR CONNEXION WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST — THE CALL OF ABRAM ; GOD'S PROMISE TO HIM — ITS CONNEXION WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST — ITS FULFILMENT IN CHRIST — REFLECTIONS.

THE ECONOMY OF PREPARATION.

It has been shewn, first, that the redemption of mankind, and the mode of it, were appointed in the Divine councils before the foundation of the world—secondly, that immediately upon the fall, the first grant of grace was vouchsafed in the promise of a Redeemer, a Conqueror and Sufferer in man's behalf — and thirdly, that sacrifices were instituted at a very early period by the Almighty, principally that they might be types or figures of the great sacrifice which his Son offered up in our nature, as an atonement for the sins of all mankind.

The economy of preparation is now to be proceeded with ; that remarkable feature of the

counsel of God in Christ, which belongs to no other system of religion whatsoever, and which plainly indicates the Divine mind making ready the way by various signs and intimations, through a course of ages, for the advent of the victorious seed that was to bruise the serpent's head, and delivering mankind out of captivity to restore them to the liberty of God. This economy is so clearly noted down and marked in the Scriptures, and all its connected and consecutive parts are so visible to the eye of the humble and candid inquirer, that the pen of an angel or a diamond of heaven could scarcely have rendered them more legible and evident.

THE TRANSLATION OF ENOCH.

While recounting the genealogy, age, and death of the patriarchs, Moses superadds of Enoch, "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."* This good man lived in an age when wickedness abounded in the earth, when the very name and existence of God were almost forgotten among men. He was a burning and a shining light in times when gross darkness covered the world.

We read that he was born 300 years before

* Gen. v. 24.

Adam's death. Having conversed with him so long, he was well acquainted from the best authority with the nature and circumstances of the fall, and with the gracious promise of God relative to the Conqueror and Sufferer to come. And we have the testimony of the Apostle, that he pleased God by faith, that is, faith in the future fulfilment of his promise to Adam. He preached righteousness to a disobedient generation. He warned mankind of God's suspended wrath, and exhorted to a timely and sincere repentance, as the means of averting the approaching destruction.

Now this righteous man, who walked with God all the days of his life, looking forward in faith to the fulfilment of the Divine promise; this holy prophet, who foretold a future retribution, was suddenly taken up into heaven without seeing death, "because," says St. Paul, "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."*

THE CONNEXION OF ENOCH'S TRANSLATION WITH THE
COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

In this translation we perceive, in the first place, the gift of a peculiar reward bestowed

* Heb. xi. 5.

upon a man eminently good and faithful — and in the second, which is very material to our purpose, a strong supernatural evidence of another life after this. And hence this necessary inference is drawn, namely, that faith and righteousness being pleasing to God, all that exercise them will receive his recompense of blessing; and when this mortal career is ended, be taken up by him into heaven to live for evermore. This inference is Christian doctrine. The same is taught in the Gospel; only in the Gospel the doctrine has a stronger light thrown upon it, is made by additional information and higher sanctions more manifestly true, and bears a deeper impress of Divine authority in its having been taught by the Son of God himself.

Enoch, the man of exceeding piety and goodness, the teacher of righteousness and truth to a wicked world, the prophetic preacher of a Divine retribution, the servant of God taken up in a supernatural manner into heaven, is to be considered as a type of Christ, of Him who knew no sin; of Him who brought grace and preached repentance, faith, and obedience to creatures immersed in trespasses; of Him who foretold many things that have and will come to pass, particularly the judgment of the last day; of Him who, triumphant over death and the grave,

was taken up into heaven in a glorious manner unto his Father and our Father, unto his God and our God.

This mercy bestowed upon a righteous individual, an individual, however, partaking of the corrupted nature of Adam, was a grace connected with the early promise of God. It was vouchsafed with respect indeed to the faith and piety of the man, but for the sake only of the Redeemer, whose covenant with the Father was made before the world, and whose merits and blood, to be in after-times displayed and shed for the benefit of transgressors, were, according to that covenant, to commence their efficacy from the moment he was promised as the future Saviour of mankind.

Enoch, though eminently righteous, was nevertheless by birth an inheritor of corruption, and in heart and life not altogether without spot or blemish. He could not, therefore, have been translated, had not the Son of God previously consented to die for a fallen world, and had not the grace of God, in consequence of this consent, and in anticipation of the future sacrifice for sin, been in its measure and degree bestowed upon man from the beginning of transgression. He pleased God because he had faith in Christ, that is, because he believed that God would, accord-

ing to his promise to Adam, send a Redeemer into the world to be bruised for its salvation; and because upon the foundation and strength of this faith he lived a life of holiness and virtue. He was blessed, he was translated and admitted into the presence of God only through Christ; for there is no salvation for any that ever lived or shall live but through Him—there is no access to the Father but through the Son; no entrance into everlasting life but through Him who purchased it for others with his blood, and deserved it for others by his righteousness.

Thus we connect the translation of Enoch with the counsel of God in Christ. Bishop Horne observes, “It is appointed unto men once to die; this is the general rule; but we meet with an exception in the case of Enoch, and another in that of Elijah. Thus it pleased God to vouchsafe the world two rehearsals of the ascension of the holy Jesus; one for the building up of those before the law, the other of those under the law, in the faith of that great and important article; and both, that we of these latter days might admire the wisdom of God in foreshewing what has been accomplished, and adore his mercy and power in the accomplishment of what was foreshewn.”

NOAH'S PREACHING AND SACRIFICE.

Neither the preaching, nor the example, nor the translation of the righteous Enoch had any effect in reforming a wicked world, or awakening it to a sense of the impending danger. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."*

Nearly 670 years, therefore, after the translation of Enoch, he sent a flood of waters, and destroyed every living thing that was upon the face of the earth, except Noah and his family, and the creatures taken into the ark which God had commanded him to build, and which Noah "by faith and moved with fear" did build "to the saving of his house."† This good patriarch had "found grace in the eyes of the Lord," because "he was a just man and perfect in his generations and walked with God."‡ In consequence of which he with his wife, his sons, and

* Gen. vi. 5-7.

† Heb. xi. 7.

‡ Gen. vi. 8, 9.

his sons' wives was selected for preservation, and for the purpose of repeopling the earth, and of communicating to the new generations the history of mankind from the creation of the world.

Now Noah was well qualified to give an account of the antediluvian world from the beginning, to relate the reign of innocence in paradise, the temptation of the serpent, and the fall of Adam and Eve, the promise of a Conqueror in the seed of the woman, the sentence of the Almighty upon sin, the banishment of the transgressors from Eden, the death of Abel, the punishment of Cain, the birth of Seth in the room of Abel, the godliness and translation of Enoch, and every thing else necessary for mankind to know; for he had heard every particular from his father Lamech and his grandfather Methuselah, both of whom lived and conversed with Adam, and were not taken from the world till just before the flood, when Noah was about 600 years old. Here we have a very simple and natural way of accounting for Noah's certain and accurate knowledge of events from the beginning, without calling in the aid of supernatural communication.

There can be no doubt that this good patriarch often declared to his children and his children's children (for he lived 350 years after the

flood) the promise which God made to Adam respecting the coming of the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head. Thus were the tidings of the first grant of grace in the promise of a Deliverer, and consequently the first preparatory movement of the counsel of God in Christ, communicated to the new world by him who had lived in the old, and who, without a needless reference to immediate revelation, had received his information from sources so credible and authentic.

And that the ancient institution of sacrifice, which also forms a part of the same counsel, as being typical of the great sacrifice of Christ, might be preserved, we find that Noah, as soon as he came out of the ark, built an altar, and offered burnt-offerings upon it unto the Lord. "Noah," says Bishop Wilson, "having been preserved from the flood by a miraculous providence, the first thing he did was to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving for his deliverance, and for God's faithfulness and truth in continuing in him and in his posterity the blessing of the promised seed. This was so acceptable to God, that it drew down a blessing upon the whole earth, and a promise that it should never be destroyed again by water."—"And God said to Noah, This is the token of the covenant which

I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. I do set my bow in the cloud; and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh; and the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."*

THE CONNEXION OF NOAH'S PREACHING AND SACRIFICE WITH
THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

Now the preservation of Noah from the general destruction was one instance of God's grace, and this covenant with him was another; both connected with the early promise to Adam, and both bestowed for the sake of Christ, that is, by virtue of his compact with the Father before the foundation of the world, and in consideration of his future conquest and satisfaction. Had all flesh been destroyed by the flood, so

* Genesis, ix. 12—16.

that not one remained, there would have been an end to the posterity of Adam; and an entirely new creation must have been effected in order to the repeopling of the earth; and such beings so created could have derived no inheritance of corruption from the first transgressors; consequently the early promise of God could not have been fulfilled, as the victorious seed of the woman had not then been manifested, and could not in after-time be born in the nature of Adam and Eve which would have been extinct. Noah, therefore, was preserved in order that the generations to be born after him might be the descendants of Adam, and that from among those descendants the victorious seed might in the fulness of time arise, and duly fulfil the promise.

By the preaching of Noah the fact of God's grace, vouchsafed at the time of the fall, was communicated to the new world, and set before men as that upon which they were to exercise their faith in the great blessing to come, and to rest their hope of mercy hereafter. And by his offering burnt-offerings unto the Lord immediately after his preservation, offerings which the Lord was pleased to approve and accept, he set the seal of his authority and example to the Divine institution of sacrifice; an institution intimately and inseparably connected with faith in

the promise of God, and mysteriously typical of the bruise which the seed of the woman was to receive in the hour of his victory.

THE CALL OF ABRAM ; GOD'S PROMISE TO HIM.

The call of Abram and God's promise to him form the next link in the great chain of God's counsel of redemption.

Soon after the flood mankind began to multiply exceedingly ; and the families of Shem, Ham, and Japhet spreading themselves different ways after the confusion of tongues, the earth in process of time was replenished with inhabitants. Wickedness was also of rapid growth ; and Satan had at length acquired such an influence over the minds and hearts of men, darkening the one and corrupting the other, that the very name and worship of God were passing into oblivion. At this period the Almighty, remembering his covenant with the Son and his promise to Adam, proceeded in his economy of preparation to an act of the highest importance, namely, the selecting of a person from among the family of Shem to be the father of that peculiar people to whom he intended to intrust his sacred oracles, by whom his providential arrangements were to be carried on, and from among whom the seed of the woman was in due time to arise.

The most righteous man then upon earth, who worshipped the only true God, served him faithfully with all his heart, and trusted steadfastly in the fulfilment of his word, was Abram, the son of Terah, who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Him God chose out from among mankind, and called him, saying, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee, and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed;* or, as he afterwards said, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."†

THE CONNEXION OF THIS PROMISE WITH THE COUNSEL OF
GOD IN CHRIST.

First, let this promise to Abraham be considered in connexion with the promise to Adam.

The first promise was of a very general signification. All that could be collected from it was this; that, although Satan had through man's free consent acquired a dominion over

* Gen. xii. 1—3. † Ibid. xviii. 18; xxii. 18.

human nature, God would raise up one in that nature, mystically termed the seed of the woman, who should live in enmity with the great seducer of mankind, and who, though he himself should be partially bruised, would gain a signal victory over him, and finally destroy his power, for the deliverance and benefit of those whom he had taken captive.

Some information was here given of a general nature; but much with regard to particulars was evidently withheld; for in this promise we observe that it is not signified who this seed was to be; that no time was fixed for his appearing, no place mentioned where he was to be born, no nation or family described from which he was to arise. And if we consider the period when it was made, we shall see good reason why these specifications were omitted. The counsel of God in Christ was to be developed gradually under the direction of perfect wisdom, which revealed itself at its own pleasure, and according to the circumstances of the world.

It was first declared, when there were but two persons upon earth, that an extraordinary seed would arise to overcome the serpent, and to overcome him by virtue of personal sufferings, for the benefit of transgressors. That nothing more was said deserves our admiration. A

further disclosure at that time, and under the peculiar circumstances of our first parents, would have been unnecessary, and unsuitable to the orderly and seasonable arrangements of the Almighty.

As soon as God judged fit, he added to this promise by a further information; which information related, not to description of person and appointment of time, (subjects reserved for future prophecy,) but to place, family, nation, and a general result. He assured Abraham that he would make of him a great nation in the land which he would shew him, that is, the land of Canaan, to which he soon after conducted him, and that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Here, then, is the connexion between the two promises. The seed of the woman, the Conqueror of Satan, who according to the former was to arise in the world, was according to the latter to be born in the land of Canaan which should be possessed by Abraham's posterity, and to be a blessing to all families and nations of the earth. The great Conqueror and Sufferer was to be a universal Benefactor. The seed of the woman was to triumph for all, and the fruit of his victory was to be deliverance and the means of joy and preservation to all ages and nations from the beginning to the end of time.

THE FULFILMENT IN CHRIST OF GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM.

Next, let this promise to Abraham be considered with relation to its fulfilment in Christ.

Abraham was, we know, the father of the Hebrews. This people in process of time increased greatly in numbers, and after many vicissitudes succeeded under the providence and with the special aid of God in taking possession of the land of Canaan, and establishing themselves therein as a distinct and separate nation.

In this land and from among this people Christ was born, being lineally descended from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. Now who among the seed of Abraham has been a blessing to all families and nations? On whom among all his posterity can we fix our eye, and say, This is the victorious seed of the woman that has bruised the serpent's head — this is he who has proved a blessing to all mankind? If we select Moses, or Samuel, or David, or any one of the righteous men of old, we shall find upon examination that facts will not justify the selection; for how could imperfect beings or men who had committed sin, and were consequently to a certain degree under the dominion of Satan, ever succeed in destroying his power? or what did any of them at any time do or suffer

as a blessing to all nations past, present, and to come?

In Christ alone has the world been blessed. In no other besides him can we behold human nature without sin, human nature triumphant over the malice, the temptation, and the power of Satan. To no other can we apply the peculiar and distinguishing appellation, the seed of the woman—to no other ascribe the achievement of a victory amidst bruises and sufferings for the sake and salvation of the world. He stands alone, man, and yet more than man, even God Incarnate—man in all the entirety of man's nature, yet man without sin—man in union with Divinity—man in perfection, separate from all mankind. In all things and at all times he obeyed the holy law of God, and thereby merited for fallen creatures the Divine favour; and he shed his blood upon the cross as “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.” All families and nations of the earth, whether we look back to the beginning or forward to the end, will be found to receive their justification only through his merits and blood. He is the Saviour, and the only Saviour of men. He is the way and the truth, the resurrection and the life, the ransom of souls from captivity and wrath, the sufferer on

the tree for our iniquities, the advocate and intercessor with the Father for us miserable sinners,

In the call of Abraham, therefore, and in God's promise to him, and afterwards in the same terms to Isaac and Jacob, another link of the great chain of the counsel of God in Christ is visible; for as this promise was made, as has been shewn, in respect to Christ, we must consider it as forming a part of that counsel, it being one of the preparatory arrangements of the Divine mind for the revelation by him. Should any one question the propriety of connecting this promise with Christianity, or think that we carry its signification further than is warranted, we refer him to the testimony of the Apostle, who says, "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before," that is, before the giving of the law, "the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed."*

REFLECTIONS.

In the gradual unfolding of God's purposes in the redemption of the world by his only begotten Son, the pious mind sees cause for the highest admiration and the warmest grati-

* Gal. iii. 8.

tude. Although we have but a faint conception of the perfections of God, we cannot but entertain very sublime notions of his attributes of justice, wisdom, and goodness, when we contemplate them harmoniously co-operating in the progressive developement and final revelation of the Christian economy. Man by transgression incurs the Divine wrath—God promises him a future deliverance from the power of the seducer by one born of a woman. He employs no agent at first to communicate his intended grace; but with his own voice proclaims it in the ears of sinners bowed down with guilt and apprehension. He sets the seal, as it were, with his own hand, to the declaration of mercy. He afterwards adds to this promise, and, as before, testifies and confirms his further information by his own voice from heaven.

We shall next find him inspiring a faithful servant to foretell other particulars concerning the promised seed, the blessing to all nations. And as we proceed, we shall gradually and continually collect from prophecy fresh intelligence respecting him, till at last we shall have before us a complete description of him, an accurate information comprehending all the identifying notices of person, time, place, character, actions, sufferings, and consequences.

He who does not behold the counsel and providence of God in this harmonious and wonderfully connected design, a design rising, growing, and at length expanding into maturity, neither affected by the lapse of ages, nor deranged by any alteration in the circumstances of the world; a design, too, that carries with it an ever-living evidence in the fulfilment of prophecy; must surely be afflicted with a mental blindness, through which, till the scales be removed, the light of truth cannot penetrate.

God, as it has been seen, called Abraham out of his native country, that he might make him the father of a peculiar people, the righteous progenitor of a nation out of which the Redeemer was to arise, and which on that account was to be favoured with a special revelation, and to be bound under a ritual yoke significant of the divine purposes afterwards to be made manifest to the world. Those purposes were in due time, and after a long and continuous preparation made manifest by the mission, doctrine, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, and the descendant of Abraham. The whole counsel of God with regard to the salvation of mankind is open to the view of all. It is, as the sun in the heavens, visible to every eye; though the film of

prejudice and unbelief prevents many from perceiving those glories, which the humble and teachable disciple can so clearly discern.

We are called by the grace of God to the light of the knowledge of salvation, to repentance, faith, and holiness, to a hope full of immortality, and to the enjoyment of eternal glory. Most unwise, therefore, are they, dead to their own interests, insensible to all that is valuable in life and desirable in eternity, who turn a deaf ear to the glad tidings of mercy, who refuse to obey the heavenly voice, who reject the invitation of divine love—those glad tidings that speak of liberty recovered and redemption purchased for transgressors—that voice which exhorts the wanderers to return from the barren wilderness of sin to the fruitful fields of righteousness—that invitation which bids the hungry to the feast of holiness, the heavily-laden to the rest of penitence, and all that live to the possession of everlasting joys.

CHAPTER IV.

ABRAHAM COMMANDED TO OFFER ISAAC — THIS COMMAND AND ACT ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST — THE PROPHECY OF JACOB — ITS CONNEXION WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST — ITS FULFILMENT IN CHRIST — THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DELIVERED OUT OF EGYPT, A PREPARATORY STEP TOWARDS THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSES IN CHRIST — THE INSTITUTION OF THE PASSOVER — ITS CONNEXION WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST — REFLECTIONS.

ABRAHAM COMMANDED TO OFFER ISAAC.

FROM the promise of God to Abraham so evidently connected with the counsel of God in Christ, we pass to another circumstance of peculiar interest, and belonging to the same economy, namely, God's commanding this good patriarch to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham; and he said, behold, here I am. And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest; and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering

upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." *

In laying upon Abraham this painful injunction his object was, first, to try his faith, whether having received the promise of a numerous seed to arise from Isaac, he would obey a command in one view most afflicting to the feelings of a parent, and in another irreconcilable by human reason with the promise—and secondly, to signify to him in a figure and to generations after him the great sacrifice to come. That Abraham could not understand this figure in all its meaning and comprehension is evident; but it is no less evident that he considered it as connected with the coming and victory of the seed of the woman according to promise, and with some peculiar character in that future grace to which he looked forward in faith as the means of blessing to himself and all the nations of the earth. God had said unto him, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant; and with his seed after him." † And again, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." ‡

* Genesis, xxii. 1, 2.

† Ibid. xvii. 19.

‡ Ibid. xxi. 12.

But if Isaac was now to be sacrificed, how could God's word in this respect be fulfilled? How could God establish his everlasting covenant with him and with his seed after him? And how from Isaac could the promised seed descend? These difficulties must have arisen in Abraham's mind. Why, then, did he hasten to obey the command that seemed so at variance with the promise? On this point the words of the Apostle afford a satisfactory solution. "By faith," says he, "Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure."*

Abraham, then, knew that the promise with regard to Isaac was positive, and that God could not but fulfil his word. In the truth of that word he placed the fullest trust and confidence. He had an unshaken conviction that it could not fail, that it could not return void. He knew also that the command was positive, and that it was his duty implicitly to obey it. The sacrifice was demanded by the Lord; he felt, therefore,

* Hebrews, xi. 17-19.

that he ought not to presume to question its propriety, nor to hesitate in complying with the requisition, afflicting as it was. He reasoned with himself that notwithstanding the apparent incongruity of the command with the promise, God, who could not enjoin that to be done which would render what he had spoken impossible, would find out some way of reconciling them ; and the suggestion that arose in his mind was, that, as God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, he might exert his power to that end, and restoring him to life still cause him to be the child of promise, and establish his everlasting covenant with him and with his seed after him.

Urged and upheld by his faith, and feeling the necessity of obeying the command of the Lord, Abraham hastened with his son Isaac to the appointed spot. He bound his unresisting child—he laid him upon the altar on the wood—in all the bitterness and severity of parental anguish he “stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”* His resolution was fixed—the sacrifice was prepared—and in a moment the precious blood of his only son, the child of promise, would have been shed upon the altar.

* Genesis, xxii. 10.

But he had stood the test—his faith was victorious—his obedience manifested—and God suddenly arrested his hand, and prevented the execution of his purpose. “The angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham; and he said, here am I. And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went, and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.”*

THIS COMMAND AND ACT ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE COUNSEL OF
GOD IN CHRIST.

This act of Abraham preparing to offer his son Isaac in obedience to the command of God, has always been considered by the Christian church as a typical representation of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross in compliance with the will of his Father, who sent him into the world to die for its salvation. And that our particular church so understands it is evident from her

* Genesis, xxii. 11-13.

having appointed the chapter, in which the circumstance is related, to be read on Good Friday.

From Isaac bearing the wood of the burnt-offering we are carried in thought to Christ bearing his cross 1900 years after near the same spot. And when we behold the ram, which the Lord had provided, bleeding on the altar, and accepted instead of Isaac, our view is instantly turned to Christ, the Lamb of God, being sacrificed on the cross in the stead and for the preservation of the world. "This ram," says Bishop Patrick, "was a notable type of Christ, who was a sacrifice provided by God, not by man, as the ram was brought by Divine Providence, and not by Abraham."

Now let us see what we have gained for our purpose. From the promise to Adam we learned that a particular seed of the woman would arise who, for the sake of the seduced, should conquer the seducer, though to a certain degree to his own hurt. From the promise to Abraham we discerned that this seed of the woman, this suffering conqueror for others, was to descend from him, to be born in the land of Canaan, and to be a blessing to all nations. And from the incident just related we draw this very important intelligence, namely, that the victorious seed was to

be an offering prepared for the sacrifice, not by man, but by the Almighty; and that he was to suffer death in the stead and for the sake of that which was previously devoted to destruction. This representation of a vicarious death to be undergone by the victorious seed is in perfect harmony with the preceding promises; for the first promise said that his heel should be bruised by the serpent; and the second, that his coming should be a blessing to all nations; both which facts were verified in Christ, the one in his enduring the agonies of the cross, and the other in his bearing the sins of many, and reconciling them to God.

THE PROPHECY OF JACOB.

To Adam and Abraham God had spoken with his own voice; and thus laid the foundation of the hope and faith of his creatures in his own direct and immediate authority. He next inspired his faithful servant Jacob to foretell other circumstances relative to the great event of redemption.

That holy patriarch being arrived at a period when he was to be gathered to his fathers, and to be taken to his reward, called his sons to him that he might bless them, and tell them that which should befall them in the last days, that

is, in future times. When he came to bless Judah, the spirit waxed strong within him, and he prophetically exclaimed; "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise; thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."*

From this prophecy it appears that the posterity of Judah were to be a people of a warlike and valiant disposition; that they were to obtain the ascendancy over their brethren; that they were to be a terror to their enemies in the days of their greatest prosperity; and that they were to possess a sceptre and a lawgiver, that is, to have rulers and legislators of their own, till Shiloh or the Messiah came; when their power and authority as a body politic were to cease, and the Gentiles to be gathered unto him.

* Genesis, xlix. 10.

THE CONNEXION OF THIS PROPHECY WITH THE COUNSEL OF
GOD IN CHRIST.

Now this Shiloh whom Jacob had in view, as the mighty one of Judah to whom the people were to be gathered, was evidently the promised seed of the woman and the blessing to all nations; the same to whose future coming Adam and Abraham looked forward in faith; and of whom the ram sacrificed in the stead of Isaac was a type or figure.

In the promise to Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob nothing was said with regard to the time when Satan's Conqueror and man's Benefactor was to arise; but in this prophecy the first allusion was made to the period of his coming; and this period was determined to be when Judah's political existence, already maimed and enfeebled, and evincing manifest symptoms of dissolution, should be rapidly passing away, preparatory to its final and complete extinction.

The coming of Shiloh, however, although declared to be coincident with Judah's decadency, was yet left by this prophecy very indefinite with respect to time, as no number of years was mentioned by which it could be computed when that decadency should take place. Nevertheless something more was added to what had been

before promised — an obscure intimation was vouchsafed as to the time of his advent, an intimation which we shall find succeeded in after-times by a prophecy pointing out the very period when the Messiah the Prince should appear, and exactly harmonizing with the prediction of Jacob.

THE FULFILMENT IN CHRIST OF THIS PROPHECY OF JACOB.

This prediction was fulfilled in Christ, and never in any other. He was born in the land of Judah which was in Canaan, when the Jews were under the yoke of foreign governors, and were exercising only by sufferance a few remnants of their ancient power and authority. He was of the house and lineage of David, and consequently of the tribe of Judah; and is styled by St. John, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.”* He was the predicted Shiloh, the anointed one of God, being anointed by the Holy Spirit to the three sacred offices of king, priest, and prophet; the person who was sent for purposes of peace and reconciliation. And unto him were the Gentiles gathered; for as soon as his Gospel was preached to them, numbers embraced it with joy as the power and wisdom of God unto salvation;

* Revelations, v. 5.

and its truths have been received through all succeeding generations by the most civilized nations of the earth as the word of God, as the word of the Conqueror of Satan, as the word of Him who came to be a blessing to the whole world, as the word of that peacemaker who was sent to reconcile by his vicarious sufferings offending creatures to their offended Creator.

Here, then, we have advanced another step in the economy of preparation; for in addition to what was before promised, we have it declared that the victorious seed of the woman, the blessing to all nations, the vicarious victim, would come when the staff of Judah's power should be already broken, and when but a few years remained before the commonweath should be utterly deprived of every form and of all its privileges civil and sacred; and that the effect of his coming would be the gathering of the Gentiles unto him, as their chief and leader.

To those who study the Scriptures with an inquiring and reflecting mind there is nothing so striking as the notices of Christ scattered throughout the ancient oracles of God. In God's promise to Adam we have Christ presented to our view as the future deliverer of mankind. In the sacrifice of Abel, the sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock, we mentally look upon Christ, the

Lamb of God, offered up for sinners upon the cross. In the translation of Enoch we behold God in anticipation of the merits and blood of Christ thus retrospectively communicating their efficacy, foregoing his wrath on a fallen nature, and exalting its comparative faithfulness to the fruition of heaven. In the preservation of Noah we perceive God continuing the corrupt race of Adam, in order that his promise might be fulfilled, and that Christ, the seed of the woman, might be born in the nature that had transgressed, and might in it, but assuming it without its sin, bruise the serpent's head. In God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob our thoughts are directed immediately to Christ the Blessing to all nations. In Isaac ascending the mount, and carrying the wood on which it had been commanded that he should be offered up, and in the substitution of the ram in his place, we contemplate Christ moving onward to Calvary, and bearing his cross to his own sacrifice, and suffering as a victim in the stead and for the preservation of that which had been previously devoted to destruction. And in Isaac received from the dead in a figure, we have an emblem of the resurrection of Christ. And now in the prophecy of Jacob we hear the voice of inspiration foretelling the future advent of Christ under the

term of Shiloh, and the gathering of the Gentiles unto him in the days of Judah's decadency. How truly interesting it is thus to search the Scriptures, thus to trace the operations of God in Christ from the beginning, thus to gather up one by one the continuous links of that great chain of redeeming mercy, which extends from the fall throughout all ages into eternity!

The main business of human life, the chief study and anxiety of the human mind, should be to gain a knowledge of the counsels of God; because on the acquisition of that knowledge our present happiness and our eternal welfare depend. The knowledge of God, of his grace, his dealings, and his laws, of his truth and justice, of his threats and promises, and of all that he has done and worked out for us through Christ that we may be delivered from his wrath, and be blessed with his favour, cannot be obtained without continual application of mind to his revealed word, and intense meditation of soul on the absolute necessity, if we would be happy for ever, of believing on his son Jesus Christ, and following the steps of his most holy life. The pursuit after such knowledge is the wisest and most profitable act of the human mind; the gain of it tends to produce the re-

newal of the inner man, and such renewal is the appointed pass unto salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DELIVERED OUT OF EGYPT—A
PREPARATORY STEP TOWARDS THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S
PURPOSES IN CHRIST.

The descendants of Abraham consisted as yet of only a few persons; and the prospect of his seed becoming a great nation, and taking possession of the land of Canaan, was very remote. When Joseph, by permission of Pharaoh, sent for Jacob and his family to come down into Egypt, "all the souls of the house of Jacob which came into Egypt were three-score and ten."* Israel, however, grew and multiplied exceedingly in Goshen; and these shepherds, so despised by the Egyptians on account of their occupation, were settled in a land that was not theirs; but settled therein only for a time, as Jacob and Joseph on their death-beds gave them assurance. "Behold, I die, said Jacob, but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers."† And Joseph said unto his brethren, "I die, and

* Genesis, xli. 27.

† Ibid. xlviii. 21.

God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."*

Before the universal blessing should appear, the children of Israel were to become a distinct nation, possessing the land of Canaan, and to be erected into a commonwealth governed by its own rulers and laws. In order to bring about this important event, God sustained and cherished them in Egypt for about two hundred years, till they had multiplied abundantly and become mighty, and till the Canaanites had filled up the measure of their iniquities. He then prepared to deliver them from the oppression of Pharaoh, who was jealous of their numbers, and to bring them unto the land which he had promised to their forefathers, and wherein his temple was to stand, his unity to be worshipped, his sacred oracles to be preserved, and the conquest over Satan to be gained for the benefit and blessing of the whole world.

For this purpose he selected Moses, who had been saved from perishing in his infancy, to be their leader; and sent him to Pharaoh to ask permission for the Israelites to depart

out of Egypt. Pharaoh, however, who had hardened his heart against them, rejected the petition with indignation; and it was not till the judgments of the Lord in ten successive plagues fell upon him, that he consented, or rather was constrained, to let Israel go.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE PASSOVER.

Now it was at this time that a very important institution took place; important, when viewed as a commemoration of a most providential mercy extended towards the Israelites in the hour of a dreadful retribution upon the Egyptians; and still more important, when considered as a type of the salvation of mankind through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. This institution was that of the passover, which God commanded the children of Israel to celebrate as a memorial of their deliverance from the wrath that was executed on all the first born in the land of Egypt.

First, an account of this institution is to be given—and then it is to be shewn how it was applicable to the counsel of God in Christ, and how the mystery of the shadow was cleared up by the coming and revelation of the substance.

God had determined to visit Egypt with a plague more dreadful than any of the preceding ones, even the destruction of her first born—and being pleased to preserve Israel, as he had done on former occasions, from the pouring out of this vial of his wrath, he spake thus unto Moses and Aaron.

“Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house; and if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; ye shall take it out from the sheep or from the goats; and ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts, and on the upper door-post of the houses, wherein ye shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor

sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it, with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is the Lord's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment; I am the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; and ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever."*

Having given them this command God was prepared with his mercy to preserve them, if they would do as they were bidden. They did universally obey him in the thing which he

* Exodus, xii. 3—14.

had enjoined; and the consequence was that their first born escaped the plague which spread destruction and misery over all the land of Egypt. The blood of the lamb without blemish was the token of preservation to the inhabitants of Goshen. The destroying angel seeing the blood, passed over their dwellings, not being suffered to enter in to smite the first born of the people of the Lord.

THE CONNEXION OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE PASSOVER
WITH THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

But what had the institution of the pass-over to do with the counsel of God in Christ? Much every way. It was evidently intended to prefigure Christ and the benefits that would accrue to mankind from the shedding of his blood. He was the true Paschal Lamb, the Lamb without blemish; the Lamb slain for the sins and sake and in the stead of a fallen world; the Lamb whose blood, if it be sprinkled on our souls, will save us from the wrath of God; for he, seeing upon us the seal of the sacrifice of his Son, will, as it were, pass over us that we may be preserved in the day of his visitation.

There can be no doubt that the institution of the passover, although ostensibly a com-

memoration of a signal deliverance from temporal evil, was a part of that grand scheme of grace, which was being gradually developed, and would most certainly be perfected in due time. And that this institution was connected with the sacrifice of Christ we have the words of the Apostle to shew, who says, "For even Christ our passover was sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."*

REFLECTIONS.

Thus we see, as we advance, how the counsel of God in Christ is unfolded in those preparatory arrangements which preceded the flood, and those which were made afterwards previously to the delivery of the Mosaic law. From the first it presents itself to us as a scheme of deliverance or redemption by atonement—as such it preserves its character through ages and generations—and as such it was clearly manifested in due time. The bruise which the seed of the woman, the deliverer of mankind, was to receive—the institution of sacri-

* 1 Corinthians, v. 7, 8.

fice in expiation of sin and in propitiation of Divine mercy—the offering up of that which could not commit sin, in room of that which was by nature sinful—and the sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb for the preservation of the people from the effect of Divine wrath—were so many notices that an offended God was to be appeased, and offending man to be reconciled to him, through the vicarious sufferings and precious blood of one who was in after times to come into the world.

Christ Jesus received the predicted bruise. In the hour of the power of darkness he died upon the cross; but the moment he yielded up the ghost the victory was gained, and mankind were delivered from wrath, ransomed from bondage, and reconciled to God. “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”* He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; meek, patient, unrepining. He bore the wood on his shoulder to his own sacrifice, content to endure every indignity, to be reviled as a blasphemer, to be crucified as a malefactor, that the creatures of his love might through

* Isaiah, liii. 5.

his humiliation be brought unto God. His blood streamed down the cross, innocent, precious, purifying blood; blood shed in expiation of guilt, the guilt of the whole world; blood so acceptable in the sight of God that, if souls be sprinkled with it, the Divine wrath will pass over them in the night of desolation, and they will be spared to be filled with the joy that cometh in the morning of the resurrection.

“While, then”—to use the words of a great divine*—“it is to the Jews a scandal and to the Gentile Greeks a folly, that God should put his own beloved Son into so sad and despicable a condition; that salvation from death and misery should be procured by so miserable a death; that eternal joy, happiness, and glory should issue from such springs of extreme sorrow and shame; that a person in outward semblance so contemptible, exposed to so infamous and slavish usage, should be the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind, the King and Judge of all the world,” it should be to us “who discern by a clearer light, and are endued with a purer sense derived from the Divine Spirit,” a subject of faith, gratitude, and praise.

While we think upon the bitter and my-

* Dr. J. Barrow.

sterious sufferings of our blessed Saviour, the seed of the woman bruised on the tree for our trespasses and deliverance; the vicarious victim dying in unutterable torture that we might live in inconceivable bliss; the spotless lamb sacrificed for our preservation from the wrath of God; the reflection should excite in us an abhorrence of our sins and a resolution to forsake them—for those sins are as the railing tongues of the Jews blaspheming the Son of God; they are as the voices of the outrageous multitude crying out, Away with him, crucify him, crucify him; they are as the thorns, the nails, and the spear tearing and torturing the Lord of life.

Numerous and signal have been the visitations of the Almighty upon nations that have provoked him to anger by their multiplied iniquities; and none ever felt the severity of his judgments more than the hardened inhabitants of Egypt. The visitation of that memorable night, when the angel of the Lord destroyed all the first born in the land, was one of the most afflicting upon record. "There was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead."*

* Exodus, xii. 30.

Numerous and signal also have been the providences of God over those who have paid obedience to his will; and often and conspicuously were those providences vouchsafed in favour of the children of Israel, when they placed themselves under his protection. The oppressed shepherds of Goshen did as they were enjoined to do, and the Divine wrath passed over them. It entered not in where the blood of the lamb was sprinkled. Security and joy were in the dwellings where the sacred token was displayed. It pleased God to preserve his people, that they might know and feel his mercies, and learn by their experience of them, while all around was misery and doleful lamentation, to bless his holy name, and serve him with greater zeal and affection for the future. And it pleased him also to enjoin the annual commemoration throughout their generations of this special deliverance, that they might by duly keeping the feast worthily celebrate his praise and acknowledge their gratitude, and make a solemn sacrifice of their souls unto him as their Almighty Preserver in the night of his vengeance upon the Egyptians, and the sure rock of defence then and for ever to all that would serve him faithfully, according to his will. So that the passover was in-

stituted that it might be both a memorial for the future of a saving mercy in time past, and an emblem of a still greater saving mercy when the blood of Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, should be shed for the redemption of the world.

Now man should reflect that with regard to the visitations and providences of God the same principle of perfect justice and mercy directs his dealings towards individuals as well as nations. A nation is individuals in the aggregate; and the sum of general depravation is made up of the accumulated items of particular transgressions. The same rule, therefore, that applies to and affects the amount, applies to and affects every thing of which it is composed. Hence every one is to consider himself as under the eye and governance of God, whose justice will not allow sin to go unpunished, and whose mercy will not fail to bless the upright and truly-penitent soul.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION—A PREPARATORY MOVEMENT
OF THE COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST—THE SERPENT OF
BRASS ERECTED IN THE WILDERNESS, A TYPE OF CHRIST
LIFTED UP ON CALVARY—THE PROPHECY OF BALAAM—
ITS FULFILMENT IN CHRIST—THE PROPHECY OF MOSES
RELATIVE TO THE GREAT PROPHET TO ARISE IN JUDAH
— ITS FULFILMENT IN CHRIST—REFLECTIONS.

THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION.

THE next important circumstance to be considered in the economy of preparation is, the special revelation of God to the Israelites, called the Mosaic law or dispensation, because delivered to them through the ministry of Moses.

In the third month after their departure out of Egypt, the children of Israel came into the wilderness of Sinai, and encamped therein to the number of about 1,500,000; 600,000 of whom were men above the age of twenty, and fit for war. As the time was approaching when this chosen people, now become so considerable, were to take possession of Canaan, concerning which the Lord had said unto

Abraham, "Unto thy seed will I give this land,"* God, previously to the fulfilment of his promise, judged it meet to impart to them a special law, and to accompany the delivery of it with a manifestation of glory so plain and so awful, that there should be no possibility of their mistaking the source from which it flowed, or of their not feeling the obligation to observe and do it.

Accordingly he descended on Mount Sinai in the midst of thunderings, and lightnings, and smoke, and the sound of a trumpet exceeding loud; and with his own voice, speaking out of the Divine Glory, he delivered the Ten Commandments in the hearing of the people; and afterwards the rest of his laws and ordinances in the hearing of Moses only, who was permitted to "draw near unto the thick darkness where God was."†

This law, thus proclaimed from the cloud of great and holy terrors, was of so peculiar a nature as to bear evident marks of being a dispensation from God for particular purposes; and containing, amidst its various injunctions, something hidden, something mysterious, something which future time and events would elucidate.

* Genesis, xii. 7.

† Exodus, xx. 21.

If we look at this dispensation in its three branches separately and with reference to the Hebrew commonwealth only, we behold in its civil economy laws suited to the circumstances, and calculated to promote the good government of the people—in its moral economy laws most just and holy, in every way worthy of God, and in a high degree beneficial to man—and in its ritual economy laws burdensome indeed and of a singular character, yet tending to advance the interests of true religion by leading the mind through outward and ceremonial observances to an inward and spiritual service, by impressing it with a conviction of its own unworthiness, and by keeping alive, through a daily and severe discipline, a sense of dependence upon God. But if we look at these three branches conjointly and with reference to other nations and to the mysterious designs of the Almighty, we see in the strong peculiarity of the whole the divine intention to make the Israelites a distinct, separate, and remarkable people, to prevent their falling into the idolatrous worship and customs of their neighbours, and to prefigure by a minor light, and by various types and shadows the coming of the day-spring from on high, and the good things to be brought to pass by his visitation.

THIS DISPENSATION A PREPARATORY MOVEMENT OF THE
COUNSEL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

In the rites and ceremonies appointed by the Mosaic law we perceive types of Christ and his kingdom. To prove this point, and thereby confirm his converts in the faith, was a main object of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews. Therein, after declaring the essential dignity of the Son by whom God had revealed himself, he shews that Christ had by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than the angels*—that he was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who had builded the house hath more honour than the house†—that he was a high priest superior to Aaron, as he continuing ever had an unchangeable priesthood; ‡ and as he himself was passed into the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man §—that the law, making nothing perfect, || and containing those things which were figures of the true, ¶ he was the Mediator of a better covenant established upon better promises,** and bringing in a better hope ††—that he had entered in once into the

* Hebrews, i. 4. † Ibid. iii. 3. ‡ Ibid. vii. 24.

§ Ibid. viii. 2. || Ibid. vii. 19. ¶ Ibid. ix. 24.

** Ibid. viii. 6. †† Ibid. vii. 19.

holy place, into heaven, not as the high priest of the worldly sanctuary by the blood of goats and calves to obtain an annual remission ; but by his own blood to procure an eternal redemption for us *—and that when he came meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances were to cease, as they were imposed upon the people by Moses only until the time of reformation.†

Whether we contemplate the tabernacle in the wilderness or the temple in Sion—the inner sanctuary with the ark and its symbols—the vail that separated the holy place from the holy of holies—the daily incense rising to heaven—the shew-bread placed upon the table before the Divine Majesty—the golden candlestick illuminating the sacred house—the laver containing the consecrated waters to wash away impurities—the priest making atonement for the people—or the sacrifices without blemish burning upon the altar with the blood sprinkled round about it—we cannot but see a very extraordinary concurrence and accumulation of types and shadows prefiguring Christ and his kingdom.

“No man,” however, as the Apostle testifies, “is justified by the law in the sight of God.”‡

* Hebrews, ix. 12.

† Ibid. ix. 10.

‡ Galatians, iii. 11.

Although he fulfil the deeds of the law, and offer up all the sacrifices which the law enjoins, he is still under wrath and condemnation; "for the just shall live by faith; and the law is not of faith."* "Wherefore, then, serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."† It "was our schoolmaster to bring men unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith"‡ in him, who "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."§ "It entered that the offence might abound;"|| for "by the commandment sin became exceeding sinful;"¶ and as "it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the law to do them,"** all were under the curse from which nothing but an unsinning obedience, of which they were naturally incapable, could deliver them. Although, therefore, the law was a divine dispensation, a shadow of good things to come, a preparatory arrangement for the promised grace; yet it could not justify in the sight of God, it could not through its sacrifices offered daily take away the guilt of

* Galatians, iii. 11, 12.

† Ibid. iii. 19.

‡ Galatians, iii. 24.

§ Romans, x. 4.

|| Romans, v. 20.

¶ Ibid. vii. 13.

** Galatians, iii. 10.

sin. This absolution, this justification, this expiation was to be effected, not under the ministration of the letter that killeth, but under the ministration of the spirit that giveth life;* not under the law which was given by Moses, but under the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.†

Hence it is deduced that the Mosaic dispensation is to be considered as part of the counsel of God in Christ, inasmuch as under shadows and resemblances it represented Christ and his church; and was a divine counsel made known to the Israelites to prepare them for "the faith which should afterwards be revealed."‡ It disturbed none of the previous preparations for the coming of the Redeemer and his kingdom. It confirmed them all, and was the means of preserving them from oblivion by embodying them with the written law known to all the congregation of Israel. And thus we establish the harmony between the two covenants; for while we acknowledge that there is no redemption by Moses and the law, we cannot without Moses and the law confirm beyond all controversy the truth of the redemption by Christ and his Gospel.

* 2 Corinthians, iii. 6.

† John, i. 17.

‡ Galatians, iii. 23.

THE SERPENT OF BRASS ERECTED IN THE WILDERNESS, A
TYPE OF CHRIST LIFTED UP ON CALVARY.

An incident recorded in the book of Numbers throws a little more light upon the future designs of God, already opened in part by promise and prophecy.

It appears that in the fortieth year, when the Israelites were expecting to be taken from their wanderings in the wilderness, and to be settled in the land of Canaan, they found themselves conducted back by the cloud of the Lord towards the Red Sea. In consequence of this they were much discouraged, and spake, not merely with inconsideration, but with angry remonstrance against the Lord and against Moses. "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water, and our soul loatheth this light bread."* The anger of the Lord was kindled at this ungrateful, intemperate, and distrustful conduct in those who had received at his hands so many providential mercies, and who were living under a perpetual manifestation of his miraculous power. He, therefore, visited them with a heavy judgment. He sent fiery

* Numbers, xxi. 5.

serpents among them, of whose bite much people of Israel died. This calamity brought them to repentance. And the Lord commanded Moses to make a fiery serpent, that is, a figure of brass resembling a fiery serpent, and to set it upon a pole, so that all Israel might see it; at the same time graciously declaring that every one that was bitten, and looked upon it, should live. Moses did as he was commanded, and the people, when they looked upon the serpent of brass in penitence and faith, were restored to health.

Now in the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness upon a pole, that they who looked upon it might be healed, we have an emblem of Christ's being lifted up on Calvary upon a cross, that all, who should behold him in faith, might be saved. That we may not be thought to give this occurrence a signification according to our own fancy, or to suit the business of our argument, we produce the words of our Saviour, who himself recognizes and interprets the mystery in the wilderness. "As Moses," said he, "lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

* John, iii. 14, 15.

THE PROPHECY OF BALAAM.

A very singular prophecy next occurs representing the future Shiloh under the symbols of a God and a King.

In our meditations upon the dealings of God with mankind, we cannot but have observed that, although he has generally selected the good to carry forward his designs and promote his glory, he has occasionally permitted evil men to become instruments in furthering the purposes of his providence. The prophecy, now to be brought under consideration, was uttered by Balaam, a native of Pethor in Mesopotamia, who was a true prophet, and might once have been a good man ; but who, loving the wages of unrighteousness, turned from the service of the living God, and resorted to the practice of enchantment.

The occasion of the prediction was this. Balak, king of Moab, seeing all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and being sore afraid of the people because they were many, sent in concert with the Midianites to Balaam, and tempted him with gifts and promises to come and curse Israel. Balaam came at last, running greedily for reward ; but when he opened his mouth to curse, he found himself controlled by

divine power, and was constrained to bless. He could not go beyond the commandment of the Lord.

It was when he had ceased his divinations, and had at last surrendered himself, not willingly but by constraint, to the direction of God's Holy Spirit, that he broke out into that fine strain of prophecy, which neither the scholar nor the Christian can read without feelings of the highest admiration. Having predicted the prosperity of Israel in language the most beautiful and sublime, "he took up his parable and said, Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said; and the man whose eyes are open hath said; he hath said which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open; I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."*

THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROPHECY IN CHRIST.

Balaam evidently spake as the Spirit gave him utterance; and he as evidently spake of

* Numbers, xxiv. 15-17.

some very extraordinary person that was to appear in the world. But the prediction of the coming of such a person was not a new thing; and as the prophecy just quoted agreed with the former promise and prophecy with regard to the people and land whence he was to arise, they had all a manifest direction towards the same individual object; they were as separate rays issuing from the same source, and converging to the same point.

The person of whom Balaam thus spake was clearly the Shiloh of Jacob. Him he said he saw in a vision, not as one existing at that time upon earth, or whose coming was nigh at hand; but as one who should not appear till ages and generations had passed away. He represented him as a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre out of Israel; and consequently as a very exalted and powerful person; for a star was the ancient emblem of a God, and a sceptre denoted a Prince or Ruler.

Now this prophecy was delivered upwards of 1450 years before Christ; the words therefore, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh," agree very well with the time of his appearing. He was a star and a sceptre; that is, a God and a King, a divine and human being, whose kingdom of glory was in the hea-

vens, and whose kingdom of grace was to be established upon earth. He was the illuminating God that came out of Jacob, and shed his glorious light upon the world, that mankind might see their way to heaven. He was the great King of holiness and truth that arose out of Israel, and has ruled, is ruling, and will rule in the strength and majesty of God, "whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself,"* to the destruction of his enemies and the triumph of his saints.

THE PROPHECY OF MOSES RELATIVE TO THE GREAT PROPHET
TO ARISE IN JUDEA.

In the repetition of the law Moses informed the Israelites that the Lord had thus spoken unto him, saying, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."†

By this prophecy the people were assured that, at some future period not expressed, a certain person would arise out of their nation,

* Philip. iii. 21.

† Deut. xviii. 18, 19.

who would be a prophet, a prophet like unto Moses, and of a very extraordinary character; for he was to receive authority from God, and by virtue of that authority was to teach God's purposes to the world; and that they, who should reject him speaking in the name of God, would be visited with divine punishment.

THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROPHECY IN CHRIST.

Now in what person that has arisen in Judea shall we discover this peculiar prophet? We can fix our eye with satisfaction on no one but Christ. He was a prophet; for he prophesied many things, all of which, except those which belong to time yet future, came to pass. He was born in Judea of Mary, the affianced wife of Joseph, both Jews. He was like unto Moses in many things; and in every thing in which he resembled him he was greatly superior to him; which resemblance and superiority are remarkably conspicuous when we compare them particularly in the characters of Lawgiver, Deliverer, Worker of miracles, Conqueror, and Intercessor. Christ revealed the will and purposes of God. He delivered his message in the name of God; and he professed to speak and act by the authority of God. "I have not spoken of myself," said he, "but the Father which sent me, he

gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak."* When "he came unto his own, his own received him not."† They would not hearken unto him—they would not receive the good tidings which the Father put in his mouth—they would not acknowledge him as the Messiah, as the Shiloh of Jacob, as the Blessing to all nations, as the Conqueror of the serpent—they would not allow the credentials of his mission, although accompanied by miracles, and attested by a voice from heaven—and the consequence was, that God required it of them. He brought upon them his severe judgments. The sword went through the land, and thousands miserably perished. Famine and faction raged within the devoted city, and strewed their victims in the streets. A judicial fury laid Jerusalem and her temple in ashes; and chains far from their native home and pleasant places awaited all those whom fire, famine, faction, and the sword had spared. That this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, that he was the prophet of whom Moses spake, there can be no doubt; and it never was fulfilled in any other. St. Peter asserted, that the Christ, the Holy One of God, the Prince of life, whom the Jews had crucified,

* John, xii. 49.

† Ibid. i. 11.

was the prophet of whom Moses spake unto the fathers.*

REFLECTIONS.

Thus have we made some more advances in the economy of preparation. Additional light has sprung up before us. As notices multiply, previous arrangements become more interesting, and former intimations more clear — and as the grand scheme of redemption opens, the harmony and correspondence of all its mystical disclosures, through so many ages of the world, are indisputable evidences to the pious and reasonable mind, that the whole was the counsel and work of God.

From the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, and from the prophecies of Balaam and Moses, it appears that the victorious Seed of the woman, the Blessing to all nations, the vicarious Victim, the Shiloh to whom the gathering of the people was to be, the Paschal Lamb whose blood was to be shed for salvation, the Great High Priest shadowed under the Law; was to be lifted up as a means of preservation to the sick and dying who should look up to him in faith; that he was to be God and a King;

* Acts, iii. 22.

and that he was to be a great prophet commissioned, as was Moses, but with a more intimate communication, to speak the words of God, and to execute judgment upon all that would not receive his good tidings, nor obey his voice.

How highly gratifying to the reflecting mind is the harmony preserved all along from the beginning in this economy of preparation, this representation of various character, and this union of various character in one and the same person, and for one and the same end. How evident in all this was the counsel of God working, while ages and generations were passing away, some great and wonderful event, of the benefit of which all ages and generations were to partake! While in this busy world man is devising with anxiety his numerous projects, pursuing with industry his various speculations of interest, and erecting in hope his fair edifice of happiness, all of which are absorbed in the vortex of time and forgotten, or remembered only as dreams and vanities of departed frailty, the great God of heaven and earth, who looks from eternity through all the lapses and revolutions of time into eternity again, is carrying on his vast and complicated designs with an admirable harmony and with a certainty of success;

and is effecting in his own appointed hour those important events, which testify that, for the promotion of his own glory and the benefit of his creatures, he is bringing mighty things to pass. "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!"*

* Psalm cvii. 8.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POSSESSION OF THE LAND OF CANAAN BY THE ISRAELITES,
ANOTHER PREPARATORY STEP TOWARDS THE FULFILMENT
OF GOD'S PURPOSES IN CHRIST — JOSHUA A TYPE OF
CHRIST — PROPHECY THAT THE MESSIAH SHOULD DE-
SCEND FROM DAVID — DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST; AND
HIS PSALMS PROPHECIC OF CHRIST — REFLECTIONS ON
HIS PSALMS.

THE POSSESSION OF THE LAND OF CANAAN BY THE ISRAELITES,
ANOTHER PREPARATORY STEP TOWARDS THE FULFILMENT
OF GOD'S PURPOSES IN CHRIST.

WE now come to the fulfilment of that part of God's promise to Abraham, which assured him that the land of Canaan should be given to his seed.

Nearly forty years before the period at which we are now arrived, it had been reported by Joshua and Caleb, who with others had been sent to search this land of promise, that it was an exceeding good land, a land that flowed with milk and honey, and which the armies of Israel were able to subdue. It was, therefore, on its

own account, as a rich and fertile country, an object of considerable desire to the Israelites; but it was still more so as the inheritance which God had promised them, as the future birth-place of the Messiah, and as containing the cave where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were buried.

They had long been anxious to enter into this land, to taste its sweets, and enjoy its rest. Most grateful, therefore, to their ears was the command of Joshua, "Prepare your victuals, for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it."* At this gratifying intelligence all was joy and preparation. Every hand flew to its appointed task — every bosom beat high with hope — and every eye was bright with anticipations of good to come. As soon as the special signal was given, the ark was lifted up, and all Israel moved forward, and came to the brink of the river. A stupendous miracle was then wrought in their behalf. Jordan was driven back; the waters fled at the presence of the ark of the covenant of God, and the people passed over on dry ground in safety.

* Joshua, i. 11.

This was indeed an astonishing display of God's might in favour of the seed of Abraham ; and it was an irresistible attestation to all Israel, that the time was come when his word should be fulfilled. Another evidence that they were brought to the enjoyment of those good things, which the Lord had provided for them, was, that, as soon as they had eaten of the old corn of the land, the manna, which had been their sustenance so long, fell no more from heaven. The food, that was necessary in the wilderness, would have been a superfluity in the land flowing with milk and honey, and yielding abundance of every kind.

In a few years, after numerous victories over the nations, and numerous manifestations of Divine Providence in behalf of his people, they succeeded in possessing themselves of nearly the whole country from Dan to Beersheba, and from Jordan to the Sea. The inheritance was divided among the tribes ; and the land of promise was at length given to the seed of Abraham according to the word of the Lord.

This fulfilment of the Divine word was interwoven with the counsel of God in Christ. From the promise to Abraham it was evident that Canaan was to be possessed by his posterity—from the prophecy of Jacob it appeared that Shiloh, who

was to descend from Judah, was not to come till the Israelites should be a distinct nation under a regular government—and from the declaration of Moses we learn that the great prophet to come was to be one of Abraham's descendants. The settlement, therefore, of the Israelites in Canaan was necessary previously to the appearing of the Messiah; and it forms a strong feature in the economy of preparation; for, in order to the accomplishment of prophecy, Shiloh could not come till Judah had his sceptre and lawgiver in that very land.

JOSHUA, A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Joshua was a type of Christ, and Canaan an emblem of heaven. The latter was the place of rest; the former the conductor to it. Joshua and Jesus are words of the same meaning; they signify Saviour. As the one, solemnly commissioned by the Lord for the purpose, led the children of Israel, after all their wanderings, into the land of promise, and with mighty victories established them therein; so the other came from God to bring his holy Church, after all its severe trials in the world, into the mansions of heaven, and to give it therein, through the power and merits of his conquest, an everlasting habitation.

In reviewing the economy of preparation till the death of Joshua, it appears that at first the Redeemer was promised in general terms without any specification of time, place, nation, or family, without any delineation of person or character, and without any intelligence of what actions he was to perform, except that he was to bruise the serpent's head. He was to be a conqueror and a sufferer; a conqueror by suffering, and a sufferer in order to conquest; and both, for the release and deliverance of the captive. At length notice was given that he should be born among a particular people, the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that he should arise in the land of Canaan, and that he should come when Judah's power and privileges as a nation were passing rapidly away.

Here we have some little intimation with regard to time, place, nation, and family; enough to direct the eye to something particular, something definite, something on which it may rest with certainty; enough to convince us that providence was carrying on some vast design; but not enough to satisfy the mind that longs for elucidation, and is looking for fulfilment. In the prophecies of Balaam and Moses, and in the various types and figures of the law,

we have a slight delineation of person and character, and a mystical representation of something which the Messiah was to do and suffer. These excite curiosity and awaken interest; and while they add to our other convictions, increase our anxiety for a more minute and plain description of the Messiah to come, and for the removal of the shadows by the appearance of the substance; nor is our anxiety disappointed as we advance in our inquiries.

PROPHECY THAT THE MESSIAH SHOULD DESCEND FROM
DAVID.

According to another prophecy the Messiah was to be of the house and lineage of David.

Nathan said unto David, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name; and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put

away before thee, and thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever."*

This was evidently a mixed prophecy, and had a twofold completion; the one in Solomon, the other in Christ. Solomon was the son of David, born to him after this promise was made. He succeeded to the throne of his father, and the kingly authority continued in his family, though not for ever according to the full sense of the word, yet for several hundred years. He built a house for the name of God. He was blessed with God's fatherly protection and with extraordinary wisdom, peace, and prosperity; and was called "Jedidiah, the beloved of the Lord."† He committed iniquity, as did many of his successors; and the consequence was, that the Lord chastened him and them by stirring up adversaries against them. This part of the prophecy had allusion to those only who could commit iniquity; and is therefore inapplicable to Christ who knew no sin. God, however, shewed mercy on Solomon, and took not his kingdom out of his family, as he had done to Saul. Thus was the word of the Lord in its subordinate sense fulfilled in Solomon. It is now to be seen how it was fulfilled in Christ.

* 2 Samuel, vii. 12-16.

† Ibid. xii. 25.

Christ was the seed or descendant of David, born 1042 years after this prophecy was uttered by Nathan. His kingdom, differing from all other kingdoms, was established never to pass away. It was not temporal, but spiritual; not transient, but in the fullest sense of the word, everlasting. He built a house for the name of the Lord, even the Christian church, which is the temple and sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, and which being erected in spirit and in truth leads to the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* He was the beloved Son of God, in whom God was well pleased,† of whom he testified, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son;‡ and to whom he said, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."§ In Christ, and in Christ alone, has the kingdom of David been continued, and in him only is it established for ever. Looking, then, at this prophecy in its full signification, we cannot but observe how exactly and eminently it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Thus nearly 900 years after God's promise to Abraham we find it declared that the Messiah

* 2 Corinthians, v. 1.

† Matthew, iii. 17.

‡ Hebrews, i. 5.

§ Hebrews, i. 8.

was to descend in a direct line from David. And in addition to the former notices we have in this prophecy a plain and distinct publication of the perpetuity of the Messiah's kingdom, a lively emblem of his future church, and a striking allusion to his divine filiation. So that at every step we advance new lights appear, fresh links of the great chain of God's counsel of redemption become discernible, and evidences of the divine arrangements and preparations for the coming of the Redeemer accumulate upon us. Who can see all this, and not be rapt in admiration and amazement? Who can follow this wonderfully-connected design through so many ages and generations, and not say, The finger of God is here?

DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST, AND HIS PSALMS PROPHEC OF CHRIST.

David was a type and figure of Christ. He was the servant and elect of God; a man after God's own heart; so was Christ, but in a much higher sense and closer relation. David was raised from a low estate to the highest dignity, to be a leader and commander of the people; so was Christ, but in a more remarkable manner

* Isaiah, lv. 4.

and to a more exalted station. David was a temporal king of Israel, illustrious above all others in character and fame; Christ was its spiritual king, the chief and only sovereign of the world, "the prince of the kings of the earth,"* the first and best that ever lived and reigned. David was the shepherd of God's chosen flock, the seed of Abraham; Christ was the shepherd, not only of the ancient flock of God, but also of those sheep that belonged not to the fold of Israel, the families scattered throughout the world. And the promise of perpetuity to the kingdom of David referred to and was fulfilled in the perpetuity of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of grace established upon earth, the kingdom of glory appointed in heaven.

God had, moreover, revealed that the Christ should be born of the seed and family of David; and had declared that he would accomplish the sure mercies of David; that he would fulfil the promises made to David in the future blessings of the Messiah's reign. And that David was a type, and intended to be a type of Christ, is evident; for the Messiah is not only represented by prophecy as the heir of David, but even called by the name of David, as the following passages

* Revelations, i. 5.

will shew; "For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him; but they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them."*—"Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey, and I will judge between cattle and cattle; and I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them. I the Lord have spoken it."†—"The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim; afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."‡ These prophecies were uttered long after the death of David, and therefore could have respect only to him of whom David was the representative.

It is also clear that the Jews expected the

* Jeremiah, xxx. 8, 9.

† Ezekiel, xxxiv. 22-24.

‡ Hosea, iii. 6.

Messiah to be the son or descendant of David; for, "while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" that is, whose son do you expect the Messiah to be? "they say unto him, The son of David."* We cannot, therefore, read the Scriptures concerning David without perceiving how remarkably he is set forth as a typical representative of Christ, who proved himself to be the Messiah by every necessary and identifying evidence.

David was also in a remarkable manner a prophet of the Christian system; for he prophesied of Christ and his kingdom. His psalms were songs sung in Israel to lead her inhabitants to the worship of God and the expectation of their Redeemer. In studying these psalms we cannot but observe a spiritual and evangelical meaning in numerous passages. As the Gospel was preached to Abraham in the promise, "In thee shall all nations be blessed;" so was it preached to Israel in the psalms; for they in the spirit of prophecy sang of the Messiah and his church, of what he was to be, to do, and to suffer, and of the blessings that were to accrue to mankind both here and hereafter from the establishment of that church in the world.

* Matthew, xxii. 42.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS.

That the Psalms form a part of the Christian economy there can be no doubt; for both Christ and his Apostles quoted passages from them in evidence of his pretensions and in support of his doctrine. "They were written," says Bishop Horne, "upon a divine preconcerted prophetic plan, and contain much more than at first sight they appear to do." On this account they deserve to be studied by all Christians; for to them every thing must be interesting that relates to Christ whom they acknowledge as their Saviour and their God. Besides it is impossible to read them with attention, as being inspired compositions, and to examine them with accuracy, as containing the hidden wisdom of God since made manifest to the world, without an ample repayment of profit and information. They glow with piety—they are full of God. He is the subject of their song. His name, his attributes, his works, his dealings with mankind before the law, under the law, and since the law, and the purposes and operations of his grace with its benefits past, present, and to come, are the themes of their praises and adoration.

The study of these sacred writings has ever

been the delight of the good Christian. One of the most pious and eloquent Prelates of our Church, Bishop Horne, spent many a laborious but happy hour in expounding and illustrating them to the infinite edification of the Christian world. Though it may be thought, and perhaps justly, that there is in several places of his Commentaries, too great a tendency to adapt expressions to his special and favourite object, it cannot be denied that he has for the most part succeeded in placing in a clear and conspicuous light the evangelical signification of these divine songs.

The following quotation from his Preface cannot but be acceptable on account of the beauty which it exhibits in thought and in language, the heavenly temper of mind which it evinces, and the amiable picture which it presents of a good Christian pouring forth the overflowings of his satisfaction.

“ The Psalms composed upon particular occasions, yet designed for general use, delivered out as services for the Israelites under the Law, yet no less adapted to the circumstances of Christians under the Gospel; present religion to us in the most engaging dress, communicating truths which philosophy could never investigate, in a style too which poetry can never equal ;

while history is made the vehicle of prophecy, and creation lends all her charms to paint the glories of redemption. Calculated alike to profit and to please, they inform the understanding, elevate the affections, and entertain the imagination. Indited under the influence of Him to whom all hearts are known and all events fore-known, they suit mankind in all situations; grateful as the manna which descended from above, and conformed itself to every palate. The fairest productions of human wit after a few perusals, like gathered flowers, wither in our hands, and lose their fragranc; but these unfading plants of Paradise become, as we are accustomed to them, still more and more beautiful; their bloom appears to be daily heightened; fresh odours are emitted, and new sweets extracted from them. He, who has once tasted their excellences, will desire to taste them yet again; and he, who tastes them oftenest, will relish them best.—And now could the author flatter himself that any one would take half the pleasure in reading the following exposition, which he has taken in writing it, he would not fear the loss of his labour. The employment deterred him from the bustle and hurry of life, the din of politics, and the noise of folly. Vanity and vexation flew away for a season; care and

disquietude came not near his dwelling. He rose fresh as the morning to his task ; the silence of night invited him to pursue it ; and he can truly say, that food and rest were not preferred before it. Every psalm improved infinitely upon his acquaintance with it ; and no one gave him uneasiness but the last ; for then he grieved that his work was done. Happier hours than those which have been spent upon these meditations on the Songs of Sion, he never expects to see in this world. Very pleasantly did they pass ; and they moved smoothly and swiftly along ; for when thus engaged he counted no time. They are gone ; but have left a relish and a fragrance on the mind, and the remembrance of them is sweet."

CHAPTER VII.

PROGRESSIVE INCREASE OF LIGHT—SUCCESSION OF PROPHETS RAISED UP TO PROPHECY CONCERNING THE MESSIAH—PROPHECIES RESPECTING THE TIME OF HIS APPEARING—RESPECTING THE PLACE WHERE HE WAS TO BE BORN—RESPECTING THE PECULIARITIES THAT WERE TO IDENTIFY HIS PERSON; HIS DIGNITY, TO BE THE SON OF A VIRGIN, GOD, AND A KING—A SAVIOUR—A PRIEST—A PROPHET—A WORKER OF MIRACLES—THE CONQUEROR OF DEATH AND THE GRAVE, AND THE DISPENSER OF DIVINE GIFTS TO MEN—JONAH A TYPE OF CHRIST—PROPHECIES RESPECTING THE HUMILIATION OF THE MESSIAH; VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES PREDICTED OF HIM UNDER THIS STATE—RESPECTING THE CHARACTER HE WAS TO SUSTAIN—RESPECTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS KINGDOM—THE PROPHECY OF MALACHI; THE BOOK OF PROPHECY CLOSED—THE CONDITION OF THE JEWS DURING THE 400 YEARS THAT ENSUED—THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COMPLETED—THE OLD TESTAMENT TRANSLATED INTO GREEK—THE WICKEDNESS AND LEARNING OF THE WORLD—REFLECTIONS.

PROGRESSIVE INCREASE OF LIGHT.

WE have now considered the Divine economy of preparation for the coming of the Messiah, as evinced in the remarkable harmony and correspondence of circumstances that took place,

and of prophecies that were uttered, in different ages of the world; and in our investigation of these we have passed through a space of nearly 3000 years.

One thing must, doubtless, have struck us very forcibly in the course of our inquiry, namely the progressive increase of light that offered itself to our minds, as we descended from the first promise to Adam, through subsequent predictions and typical representations, down to that divine message to David, which assured him of the perpetuity of his kingdom in his seed that should be set up after him. But much as we have hitherto seen cause to admire the regular chain of preparation and the gradual expansion of light, we shall, as we advance, have stronger reasons for lauding and magnifying the wisdom of him, who "declares the end from the beginning,"* and worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.†

As the time of the Messiah drew nearer, it was the Divine pleasure that mankind should have notifications of him much more clear, definite, and numerous than those which they had hitherto received. The victorious Seed of the woman — the Blessing to all nations — the vica-

* Isaiah, xli. 10.

† Ephesians, i. 11.

rious Victim—the Shiloh to whom the gathering of the people was to be—the Paschal Lamb whose blood was to be shed for salvation—the great High Priest shadowed under the Law—the Restorer of health to the sick and dying who should look up to him in faith—the Star or God out of Jacob; the Sceptre or Ruler out of Israel—and the Seed to sit on his father David's throne for ever—was now to be marked with lineaments of person so plain and direct, and to be pointed out by notices so determinate with regard to character and office, and so extraordinary with regard to actions, sufferings, and events, as to render it impossible for any thing but extreme prejudice to mistake him whenever he should come.

SUCCESSION OF PROPHETS RAISED UP TO PROPHECY
CONCERNING THE MESSIAH.

During a space of about 400 years, commencing rather more than 800 before Christ, God raised up a succession of prophets in Israel, of whom Jonah was the first, and Malachi the last. These holy men were inspired to predict various and important events that were in divers ages to take place in the world. Woes, and judgments, mercies and blessings were the subjects of prophecy. Its main design, however,

was to point out the Messiah, and to foreshew all the circumstances that were to attend his coming and his abode among men, and all the blessings that were to arise out of the establishment of his kingdom upon earth.

It will now be our business to consider with attention this branch of the economy of preparation, and to see what further light is thrown upon our inquiry by those notices which were vouchsafed under this remarkable effusion of the Holy Spirit. We have observed before upon the necessary obscurity of the earliest intimations of the Redeemer; and it has been shewn how the minds of men were gradually prepared for his coming by means of some prophecies which, by an addition of a few particular marks, rendered those intimations a little more clear and evident. We come now to a series of predictions inseparably connected with all that had been promised from the beginning and foretold through ages, and which so wonderfully identified him in all their variety of indications, as to render the exact and entire fulfilment of them in two persons impossible, and to enable us to distinguish the true Messiah from all false pretenders whatsoever.

PROPHECIES RESPECTING THE TIME OF THE MESSIAH'S
APPEARING.

First, we are to see what prophecy says in this last age with respect to the time when the Messiah should appear.

We were informed in Jacob's prophecy that Shiloh would come when Judah's power and privileges as a nation were passing rapidly away; and so far some notice was at that period given of the time of his appearing; but as this time was to be determined by events, and was not fixed by any notation of years, it was impossible to say how many centuries would elapse before its arrival. But to pass from obscure intimations to plainer notices, from general outlines to particular descriptions, was the method adopted by the Almighty in his arrangements for the appearance of the Messiah.

From the prophecy of Jacob we perceive that the Messiah was to come when the Jewish polity should be in a declining condition, that portended its speedy and entire dissolution; but Daniel pointed out the time of his coming with a remarkable precision; for by a numeration of years he determined the exact period when the event should take place. "Seventy weeks," said he, that is, according to the pro-

phetical mode of computation, 490 years, "are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know, therefore, and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks," that is, 483 years; "the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease; and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation; and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolate."*

* Daniel, ix. 24-27.

Now here we observe that Daniel prophesies of four events, the coming of the Messiah, his violent death for others, the extinction of the sacrifices and oblations made in the Jewish temple, and the destruction of the city and sanctuary by the prince of the people that should come, that is, the Romans. He determines the exact period when the first three were to take place; and though he does not state with the same precision when the last was to occur; yet he evidently predicts it as following closely upon the death of the Messiah. And that there should be no doubt as to the period when these 490 years were to expire, he declares that they would commence when the commandment should go forth to restore and build Jerusalem; which commandment being afterwards issued by Artaxerxes renders the calculation certain and determinate. "The dispersed Jews," says Sir Isaac Newton, "became a people and city, when they first returned into a polity or body politic; and this was in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, when Ezra returned with a body of Jews from captivity, and revived the Jewish worship, and by the king's commission created magistrates in all the land to judge and govern the people according to the laws of God

and of the king.* From this year to the death of Christ was just 490 years."

The exact fulfilment of this most remarkable prophecy must strike every reflecting mind with admiration: and while it furnishes us with an additional developement of the counsels of God for the redemption of the world, affords another proud and triumphant evidence for the truth of the Christian dispensation. Christ was manifested at the predicted time—at the predicted time he was cut off, but not for himself—at the moment of his death, when he offered up himself the great propitiatory sacrifice for the whole world, the term appointed for the duration of the sacrifices and oblations of the Law expired; and a few years after the abomination of desolation, that is, the Roman army, destroyed Jerusalem and its sanctuary; and the judgments that were determined were poured out upon the desolate.

Again, as regards the time of the Messiah's appearing, the prophet Haggai has these words; "I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater

* Ezra, vii. 26.

than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."*

And in Malachi we read thus, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."†

Both these prophecies were uttered after the destruction of the first temple; and both declared that the Messiah should come while the second temple was standing. And the prophecy of Haggai attaches a higher degree of glory to the latter than to the former house; although the latter, because it was less rich and magnificent, but principally because it wanted the ark and the presence of the divine symbols, was greatly inferior to the former.

We observe, then, that these predictions agree in declaring the coming of the Messiah at a future period—that one points out that period by an exact computation of years—and that the others determine its arrival while the second temple should be standing.

How the prophecy of Jacob was fulfilled in Christ has already been shewn. How the words

* Haggai, ii. 7-9.

† Malachi, iii. 1.

of Daniel, Haggai, and Malachi were accomplished in him will be made appear, when we come to the consideration of his history. It is sufficient at present to confine the attention to the particular point of inquiry; the result of which has been, that during the last years of prophecy the time of the Messiah's coming was fixed to a precise and determinate period.

RESPECTING THE PLACE WHERE THE MESSIAH WAS TO BE
BORN.

The next inquiry is, as to what prophecy says respecting the place where the Messiah was to be born.

It has already been seen, according to former prophecy, that he was to come out of Israel; and we are now led to the very spot where he was to be born into the world. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah," says Micah, "though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* Out of this city of Judah, where David, the type of the Messiah, was born, it was the common expectation that the Messiah himself would arise;

* Micah, v. 2.

for when Herod demanded of the chief priests and scribes, the expounders of the Law and the Prophets, where Christ should be born, they answered, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet, and thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel."*

We have another testimony to this effect in the objection of some of the people who fancying that, because Jesus had lived at Nazareth, he was therefore born there, said, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David; and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"†

Hence we see that not only was the precise time of the Messiah's appearing fixed by prophecy; but also the very city, wherein he was to be born, mentioned by name. He only, therefore, could be the Messiah who should be born at that very time and in that very place.

* Matthew, ii. 5, 6.

† John, vii. 41, 42.

RESPECTING THE PECULIARITIES THAT WERE TO IDENTIFY
THE PERSON OF THE MESSIAH — HIS DIGNITY; TO BE
THE SON OF A VIRGIN, GOD, AND A KING.

We are now to search the prophets for the descriptive peculiarities that were to identify the person of the Messiah. In the consideration of these it will be proper, first, to take a view of the prophetic testimonies respecting his dignity.

What had been foretold with regard to the descent of the Messiah from David, and consequently to his being of the tribe of Judah, was now confirmed by the declaration that God would "raise unto David a righteous branch."* The Jews themselves made no question of this matter; for it was their universal acknowledgment that the Messiah was to be the son of David.

But prophecy began now to describe things more minutely, and enter into particulars of a more remarkable and wonderful nature. Intimately and mysteriously interwoven with all the preceding notices, and herein especially with the early promise of the victorious seed of the woman, it foreshewed that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, and that with this generation

* Jeremiah, xxiii. 5,

divinity would be associated ; “ Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel ;” * that is, “ God with us,” † or God dwelling with us, or as the Apostle writes, “ God manifest in the flesh.” ‡ Here it is distinctly foretold that the conception and birth of the Messiah would be miraculous, out of the established laws of nature, and consequently to be effected by him alone with whom all things are possible. And when we are informed at the same time that the person so born would be “ God with us,” we surely cannot see any difficulty in admitting that something more than ordinary must be attendant and consequent upon such a birth. This prophecy contains an evident allusion and bears the closest affinity to that great mystery, namely, the union of the divine and human natures in the Messiah.

We have seen that the Shiloh to come was announced under the figures of a star and a sceptre, the splendid emblems of a God and a King. But what says prophecy now with regard to this son of a virgin ? “ Unto us a child is born ; unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulder ; and his

* Isaiah, vii. 14.

† Matthew, i. 23.

‡ 1 Timothy, iii. 16.

name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.* Herein it is plainly proclaimed, that the seed of the woman, the son of a virgin, would be a gift of God to man—that he would be entrusted with the whole administration of the purposes for which he was given—that he would possess the attributes, and be identified with the being of God—that in him the perpetuity of David's throne and kingdom would be established—and that all this would be the result of God's counsel of grace and mercy. And here we behold the Messiah in his highest dignity, even as the Lord God himself, the Everlasting King of heaven and earth.

TO BE A SAVIOUR.

Prophecy now proceeds to foreshew the grand purpose for which this Immanuel, this God with us, was to be born into the world.

* Isaiah, ix. 6, 7.

The seed of the woman was, as we have seen, to bruise the serpent's head, and thereby gain a victory for the restoration of mankind to the favour of God. He was to be a blessing to all nations; and was to effect the recovery of the sick and dying who should look up to him in contrition and faith. We now hear the Messiah proclaimed as the Redeemer who should come to Zion;* as the King who should enter Jerusalem with justice and salvation;† as the Lord our righteousness, in whose days Israel and Judah should be saved;‡ as the God who should ransom his people from the power of the grave, and redeem them from death;§ and who, bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows, should cause all the ends of the earth to see his salvation.|| Thus it was foretold that the Messiah should be a Saviour; and thus was the great design of his coming, namely, the redemption of the world through his righteousness and sufferings, announced to Israel in plainer terms than before, and through Israel to all nations as they should come to the knowledge of the Scriptures.

* Isaiah, lix. 20.

† Zechariah, ix. 9.

‡ Jeremiah, xxiii. 6.

§ Hosea, xiii. 4.

|| Isaiah, liii. and lii. 11.

TO BE A PRIEST.

It was also predicted that the Messiah should be a priest.

The high priest under the law was a type of the Messiah, as has been before shewn. Now three things belonged to the priest's office, namely, oblation, intercession, and blessing. We are to see, therefore, if prophecy assigned this office with its three properties to the Messiah. In one place we read, that his soul should be made an offering for sin, and that he should bear the sins of many*—in another, that he should make intercession for transgressions†—and elsewhere that he should remove iniquity,‡ and cause every man to sit under his vine and under his fig-tree.§ Hence it is evident that the Messiah was to be a priest; and he was to be a priest of a peculiar character; for he was not only to be, according to David, a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec,|| that is, in his similitude who was not descended from Levi, and who received his priesthood by a special appointment from God out of the usual order; but also, accord-

* Isaiah, liii. 10. † Ibid. liii. 12. ‡ Zechariah, iii. 9.

§ Micah, iv. 4. || Psalm cx. 4.

ing to Zechariah, a priest upon his throne,* bearing at the same time the authority of the sacerdotal and the glory of the kingly office.

TO BE A PROPHET.

He was moreover to be a prophet. It was foretold by Moses that a prophet, like unto himself, would arise at some future period in Israel, to whom the people were to hearken on pain of divine wrath. This prophecy has already been considered. We now find it declared that the Messiah would be the anointed servant of God †—that the spirit of the Lord would rest upon him—that he would be endowed with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, with the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord ‡—and that he would preach good tidings unto the meek, § and bring forth judgment unto truth. || Since then it was foretold that he should receive as the chosen of God the divine unction, possess all wise and holy endowments, and be a teacher of heavenly truths to the world, by which good tidings should be proclaimed, he was, of course, to be a prophet.

* Zechariah, vi. 13. † Isaiah, lxi. 1. ‡ Ibid. xi. 2.

§ Isaiah, lxi. 1. || Ibid. xlii. 3.

TO BE A WORKER OF MIRACLES.

Again it was foretold that the Messiah should be a worker of miracles—that he would open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, and cause the lame to leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing*—that he would bind up that which was broken, strengthen that which was sick,† and bring out the prisoners from the prison.‡

TO BE THE CONQUEROR OF DEATH AND THE GRAVE, AND THE DISPENSER OF DIVINE GIFTS TO MEN.

The voice of prophecy likewise declared that he would be the conqueror of death and the grave. David had said, "Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope; for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption."§ And again, "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."|| In perfect unison with these prophecies were those succeeding notices given of the Messiah, whereby

* Isaiah, xxxv. 5, 6. † Ezekiel, xxxiv. 16.

‡ Isaiah, xlii. 7. § Psalm xvi. 9, 10. || Ibid. lxxviii. 18.

it was asserted that he would be the plague of death and the destruction of the grave*—that he would swallow up death in victory†—that after he had made his soul an offering for sin, his days would be prolonged‡—and that, as their King and Lord, he would pass before and at the head of those whose bonds he had broken.§ We have here abundant prophetic evidence of the future resurrection, ascension, and triumph of the Messiah; and also of the descent of divine gifts upon rebellious men in consequence of his exaltation.

JONAH A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Jonah was a prophet of the Lord, and by an incident in his life he became a type of the Messiah. He was commanded to arise and go to Nineveh, and denounce the divine judgments that impended over its inhabitants. But he fled from the presence of the Lord, and took ship at Tarshish. A tempest arising the mariners were afraid; and they decided upon casting lots, that they might know for what cause this evil befell them; and the lot fell upon Jonah. Jonah then confessed unto them his sin in having fled from the presence of

* Hosea, xiii. 14.

† Isaiah, xxv. 8.

‡ Isaiah, liii. 10.

§ Micah, ii. 13.

the Lord; and told them that, as for his sake this evil was upon them, if they would take him up, and cast him forth into the sea, the tempest would cease. "So they took up Jonah, and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging."* But Jonah was preserved from the deep, that he might still deliver the divine message to the Ninevites, and become a figure whereby the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah should be represented. "The Lord prepared a great fish which swallowed up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights,"† and was afterwards delivered; for "the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."‡

But by what authority, it may be asked, do you make Jonah in all this a type of the Messiah? It is answered; by the highest of all authorities, the authority of Christ himself; for when "certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee, he answered and said unto them; an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's

* Jonah, i. 7. † Ibid. i. 17. ‡ Ibid. ii. 10.

belly; so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, a greater than Jonas is here."* Upon the high authority, therefore, of Christ we are justified in considering Jonah a type of the Messiah.

A review has now been taken of what was foretold in the last age of prophecy with respect to the dignity of the Messiah. Plain and positive testimonies have been produced that he, who was to be the son of David and the son of a virgin, was to be God himself dwelling with us—that he was to be a Saviour, a King, a Priest, a Prophet, a Worker of miracles, and by a resurrection and ascension the Conqueror of death and the destruction of the grave, and the Dispenser from his seat in heaven of divine blessings to mankind.

PROPHECIES RESPECTING THE HUMILIATION OF THE MESSIAH; VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES PREDICTED OF HIM UNDER THAT STATE.

The prophecies are now to be consulted that spake of the Messiah in very different terms,

* Matthew, xii. 38-41.

and represented him under very different circumstances. The voices that proclaimed his dignity, declared also his humiliation. The songs that sung his triumphs as a God, were mingled with the strains that mourned his sorrows as a man.

In the following enumeration it will be right, for the sake of completeness, to introduce several prophecies of David, though they were uttered some time before the age which we are now considering.

It was foretold that the Messiah would be a branch out of the root of Jesse,* a tender plant out of a dry ground;† one who would arise out of the house of David when it was brought low; and who would, therefore, give no promise of becoming strong and great. He was to have no form, nor comeliness, nor beauty;‡ that is, no glory or attraction of outward circumstances by which men expected to know the desire of all nations. He was to be despised and rejected of men;§ to be disowned as the Messiah, to be reproached as an impostor, to be spoken against with a lying tongue, to be compassed with words of hatred,

* Isaiah, xi. 10.

† Ibid. liii. 2.

‡ Ibid. liii. 2.

§ Ibid. liii. 3.

and to be rewarded evil for good.* He was to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and to be esteemed as one stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.† He was to be wounded, not for his own, but for our transgressions; to be bruised, not because he, but because we had gone astray and committed iniquity; to be chastised and striped, not that he through correction might be reconciled to God, but that we through his sufferings and scourges might be pardoned and healed. All our griefs and sorrows, all our pains and punishment were to be laid upon him, that through his vicarious satisfaction our peace might be made.‡ His own familiar friend, in whom he trusted, was to lift up his heel against him,§ and to betray him for thirty pieces of silver.|| His dearest associates were to forsake him in his trouble; for the sheep were to be scattered, when the shepherd should be smitten.¶ The assembly of the wicked were to enclose him, to compass him with malicious fierceness,** to bear false witness against him,†† to take

* Psalm xix. 2-5.

† Isaiah, liii. 3, 4.

‡ Isaiah, liii. 3-6. § Psalm xli. 9. || Zech. xi. 12.

¶ Zech. xiii. 7. ** Psalm xxii. 16. †† Psalm xxxv. 17.

him away by distress and judgment,* to bring him as a lamb to the slaughter,† to spit upon and buffet him,‡ to plow long furrows on his back,§ to pierce his hands and his feet,|| to part his garments, and cast lots upon his vesture,¶ to give him gall to eat and vinegar to drink,** to number him with the transgressors, and to cut him off out of the land of the living,†† and yet not a bone of him was to be broken.‡‡ It was moreover declared that he would make his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.§§

Hence we see that the Messiah to come was represented in prophecy as a weak and tender shoot out of a decaying stem, as an apparently unimportant personage of the reduced family of David—as an offering for sin—as a sacrifice for others—as a sufferer by rejection and insult, by treachery and desertion, by calumny and falsehood, by divine afflictions, by persecution, cruelty, and torture—and as one who should die with the wicked, and be buried by the rich.

We have now before us the attestation of

* Isaiah, liii. 8. † Ibid. liii. 7. ‡ Ibid. l. 6.

§ Psalm cxxix. 3. || Ibid. xxii. 16. ¶ Ibid. xxii. 18.

** Ibid. lxix. 21. †† Isaiah, liii. 8-12.

‡‡ Psalm xxxiv. 20. §§ Isaiah, liii. 9.

the prophets both with regard to the dignity and humiliation of the Messiah that was to come into the world; by which it plainly appears that he was to be both God and man.

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE CHARACTER WHICH THE
MESSIAH WAS TO SUSTAIN.

What was foretold with respect to the character which the Messiah was to sustain and exhibit is next to be inquired into.

He was described as one who should not strive, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets;* that is, who, when reviled and calumniated, would not in self-vindication loudly retort the indignity; but would still continue with all meekness and forbearance, though not without a becoming zeal, to deliver the counsel of God without seeking to excite any public tumult or disturbance. The kindness and benevolence of his disposition and the sweetness of his temper were to be evident in this, that he would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;† but would, with a tender regard for the dejected and contrite spirit, strive to support and comfort it, and use every means, while a spark of grace remained, to

* Isaiah, xlii. 2.

† Ibid. xlii. 3.

revive it with his gentle breath, and encourage it gradually into a flame. Righteousness and holiness were to form prominent features in his character; for he was to be the righteous servant of the Lord, his elect in whom his soul would delight.* He was to do no violence, but to use gentleness towards all; no deceit was to be found in his mouth.† No reproaches were to escape him under the strongest provocations. No murmurs or complaints were to burst from his lips, when he was being borne as a lamb to the slaughter. While malice was doing its work of barbarity and blood, he was to be patient and unresisting; and while the Lord should for the sake of transgressors be putting him to grief, he was to be silent and resigned.

Thus we find the Messiah to come represented in character as one without spot or blemish; for he was to be the delight of God, and no man could be the delight of God, unless he possessed every virtue, exercised every charity, and discharged every duty without the slightest stain of imperfection.

In the predictions, then, of the last age of prophecy previous to the demonstration of the Messiah, we discover a most accurate description

* Isaiah, xlii. 1.

† Ibid. liii. 9.

of his person with respect to dignity, humiliation, and character. This remarkable description, added to the determinate notices of time and place, and connected with all that had been promised from the beginning and foretold through ages, was such a direction to lead men to the true Messiah, as none could mistake, but they who were purposely blind, or incurably perverse.

If while Daniel's 490 years were passing away, and while the second temple was standing, a person did not appear in Bethlehem, the city of David, and answer with the utmost minuteness and accuracy all the descriptions given of the Messiah by the prophets; we cannot but pronounce the prophecies a delusion; for a delusion they must have been, had not the events which they foretold come to pass at the predicted hour. But if the contrary were the case—if as those years were expiring, and before the second temple had passed away, and the sceptre and lawgiver had altogether departed from Judah, one did arise in Bethlehem of Judea, and in all points, without the slightest exception or failure, verify the sayings of the prophets, and concentrate in himself all the divine intimations of a Redeemer from the beginning of transgression, it is most unreasonable

not to acknowledge him to be the Messiah, and the voices that proclaimed his coming to be the inspiration of God.

PROPHECIES RESPECTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
MESSIAH'S KINGDOM.

There is, however, one circumstance more to be considered. Prophecy not only marked out the time when the Messiah was to appear, and the place where he was to be born, and enabled men by its particular descriptions to identify his person; it also declared that his kingdom should be established upon earth, foreshewing its nature and singing its successes and its triumphs.

It was foretold that in the last days, meaning the times of the Messiah, the mountain of the Lord's house, that is, the church of God, would be highly exalted, and stand as a light to the nations, attracting their view to its brightness, and their hearts to its communion*—that it would be a branch of God's own planting†—that it would gradually diffuse the blessings of peace and harmony, of temporal benefits and of spiritual profit‡—that it would prosper and flourish exceedingly, but not in Israel where the

* Isaiah, ii. 2. † Ibid. lx. 21. ‡ Ibid. lx.

Messiah was to labour with little success*—that it would be entered into abundantly by the Gentiles,† by those who walked in darkness, and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death ‡—that in process of time kings would become its nursing fathers, and their queens its nursing mothers§—that in latter days the remnant of God's people would be gathered out of all countries, and be brought unto their own land to David their prince, that is, the Messiah, who would rule over them, and feed them, and be their shepherd for ever ||—and that at last, notwithstanding all difficulties and persecutions, the church would so spread itself around, that all the ends of the earth would see the salvation of our God.¶

It has now been shewn that he, who had been represented in different ages of the world till about 1000 years before Christ, as the victorious Seed of the woman, the Blessing to all nations, the vicarious Victim, the Shiloh to whom the gathering of the people was to be, the Paschal Lamb whose blood was to be shed for salvation, the great High Priest shadowed under

* Isaiah, xlix. 4. † Ibid. lx. 5. ‡ Ibid. ix. 2.

§ Ibid. xlix. 23. || Ezekiel, xxxvii. 21–25.

¶ Isaiah, lii. 10.

the Law, the Restorer of health to the sick and dying who should look up to him in faith, the Star or God out of Jacob, the Sceptre or Ruler out of Israel, the remarkable Prophet to arise from among the children of Israel, and the Seed to sit on his father David's throne for ever — was in this last age of prophecy, as the time of demonstration drew nigh, described with the utmost minuteness and accuracy that supplied all the deficiencies of the former predictions, filled up every space that general notices had left vacant, and nearly completed the economy of preparation for the coming of the Saviour, which God had foreordained before the foundation of the world.

THE PROPHECY OF MALACHI; THE BOOK OF PROPHECY
CLOSED.

“ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.”* And again, “ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and

* Malachi, iii. 1.

he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."* With these words the book of prophecy was closed. The voice of inspiration ceased to speak when Malachi was silent. And for the space of about 400 years no prophetic song was sung in Israel, no holy men arose to give any further notice of the Messiah and his kingdom.

THE CONDITION OF THE JEWS DURING THESE FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.

During this interval the Jews experienced many vicissitudes. Successively subject to the Persians, the Grecians, the Egyptians, the Syrians, and the Romans, they felt the shock occasioned by this frequent change of masters, and by the various conflicts that arose out of this thirst for conquest, which impelled the Gentile nations to attack their polity. They were indeed for the most part favoured in a peculiar manner by their conquerors; but were too often made to lament with tears of bitterness their subjection to cruel tyrants. They had the misfortune to be hated above measure by Anti-

* Malachi, iv. 6.

ochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, principally on account of their religion which he detested, and in the place of which he wished to introduce the Grecian superstitions. And they had the mortification to hear their temple dedicated to Jupiter Olympius, to see the altar of burnt-offerings profaned by the erection of an idol upon it, and to be obliged to submit to a suspension of their daily sacrifice for three years. They were indeed severely oppressed by this inveterate enemy, who vented his rage against them in every way that cruelty could suggest. Under the tyranny of this "wicked root,"* as he is termed, Jerusalem was bitterly afflicted. "Her sanctuary was laid waste like a wilderness, her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into reproach, her honour into contempt.†

But when Mattathias and his sons, refusing to forsake their religion and to sacrifice to idols, set the example of resistance to a most intolerable oppression, and called upon the people to reassert their rights, and maintain the covenant of their fathers, a flame was kindled in Israel that ran quickly through all her borders. The trumpet was sounded; the people put on their breastplates, unsheathed their swords, and went

* Malachi, i. 10.

† 1 Mac. i. 39.

boldly forth to fight the battles of the Lord. Victory and triumph attended their noble efforts to emancipate themselves from a hateful foreign tyranny, and to cleanse their sanctuary and their city from the pollutions of idolatry. The strength of heaven was with them in their righteous cause; and the result was the overthrow of the tyrant's armies by the sword of those who fought under the banner of the Lord their God. Jerusalem lifted up her head again, and sang for gladness of heart. The sanctuary was cleansed; the statue that had been erected on the altar of burnt-offerings was removed, and even the altar itself, as it had been defiled by the heathen, was taken down, and a new one set up in its place. The ordinances of public worship were restored. Mount Sion was again pressed by the feet of the people of God; and the daily sacrifices were offered up as before by the holy priesthood. There was joy in Israel in those days; for "the Law was recovered out of the hand of the Gentiles, and out of the hand of kings, and the sinner was not suffered to triumph."*

But this joy was not of long duration. Civil miseries too soon arose among the Jews, which cast a cloud of darkness over the land; and they

* 1 Mac. ii. 48.

who, fighting with undaunted bravery for their lives, religion, and laws, had gloriously delivered themselves from the sword of the foreign enemy, became by their internal dissensions, their unnatural assassinations, and their religious hostilities, the destroyers of their own peace, and at last the cause of their total subjection to the Romans.

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COMPLETED.

There is a circumstance or two, however, of considerable importance that took place during this interval of 400 years, and should be noticed as belonging particularly to our subject.

About 300 years before Christ the Canon of the Old Testament was completed by Simon the Just, a high priest of distinguished wisdom and sanctity; and was, as set in order by him, received and acknowledged by the Jews and by their children after them, as comprising those sacred Scriptures which were written by inspiration of God. Whence accrued this advantage, namely, that it was hereby fixed, and determined, and sanctioned by the voice of the whole nation, what books were to be considered as the oracles of God, by which the pretensions of any person claiming to be the Messiah were to be tried.

THE OLD TESTAMENT TRANSLATED INTO GREEK.

Soon after this another design of highest moment was formed and carried into effect. The Holy Scriptures, the Canon of which had been thus publicly received and acknowledged by the Jews, were by the command of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, translated from the original Hebrew into the Greek language. Hence as this was the most known tongue in the world, and formed a part in those times of a liberal education, they were rendered intelligible to the Gentiles, and became more and more the subject of study and conversation.

THE WICKEDNESS AND LEARNING OF THE WORLD.

It is worthy of note also that, when the time of demonstration drew nigh, wickedness abounded in the world among the Jews, as well as among the Gentiles; and that while gross and cruel superstitions disgraced the latter; religious abuses and pretences were the reproach of the former. And yet this age of vice and irreligion was an age of philosophy and refinement; an age when science and the polite arts flourished exceedingly, and when the highest in rank were themselves both the patrons and examples of learning.

REFLECTIONS.

Thus do we derive from these latter days several satisfactory testimonies of the secret counsels of the Almighty providing for the manifestation of the Messiah at the appointed time. It was before observed that the economy of preparation was *nearly* completed when prophecy ceased; *nearly*, because although divine notices of the Messiah were no longer vouchsafed, a system of preparation was still going on. The cessation of miracles and of prophecy for so long a space—the troubles and vicissitudes which Israel underwent—the completion of the Canon of the Old Testament—the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek—and the state of the world as the time of demonstration approached—are all to be considered as forming a part of the economy of preparation. For the gifts of miracles and of prophecy were evidently withdrawn for a while, that men's minds might be the more struck with their revival after so long an intermission, and the public attention be the more attracted by the sudden exercise of them in the person of the Messiah—the troubles and vicissitudes of the Jews portended the passing away of the sceptre and lawgiver from Judah—the completion of the Canon of the Old

Testament was an arrangement previous to the introduction of the New — the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek was admirably calculated to serve the interests of a religion which was to spring from the same source, and to be offered without exception to all the nations of the earth — and the state of the world, as the time of demonstration approached, was such, both with regard to the prevalence of wickedness and the acquirements of learning, as to call for him who was to reform it by bringing in everlasting righteousness, and to improve it by making known the wisdom and the truths of God.

In the preparatory arrangements made for the coming of the Redeemer, arrangements carried on through a space of 4000 years, connected in all their parts, consistent in all their varieties, and tending by degrees to the elucidation and accomplishment of one grand design, the Christian sees and confesses the finger of God, and cannot refrain from exclaiming, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."*

We look at the wonders of creation and are lost in amazement at all the might and mystery

* Psalm cxviii. 23.

around us. We contemplate the order and regularity of nature in all her operations, the providential arrangements that are made for all that vegetates and all that breathes, and the marvellous system of preservation that extends through all space and to every being, and are rapt in astonishment at that divine power, wisdom, and goodness, with the character of which all things are impressed, and of the riches of which all things are full.

But when we reflect upon the counsel of divine grace which has made provision for the salvation of immortal souls, for their deliverance from sin and death, and for their admission into everlasting bliss — that counsel of mercy which promised peace in the beginning, gave in divers ages hope of good to come, and effected reconciliation in the end — that counsel of faith which leads to the adoration of a Divine Saviour living and dying upon earth, that we may live and never die in heaven; and which carries us in thought to that hour of glory and triumph when the bodies of the righteous rising from their graves will pass with their souls into consummate felicity — we can fix no bounds to our gratitude for that great love wherewith God loved us in saving us from our sins, nor to our admiration of that wonderful design which provided and

effected so vast a blessing for transgressors as a restoration to divine favour.

The study of the prophecies is a grand, interesting, and delightful study; for it is the study of the wisdom of God mysteriously disclosed at different periods of time, and bringing in his appointed hour mighty and gracious things to pass.

In the consideration of prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled we may, it is true, because of the veil that yet hangs between us and their completion, be led to indulge amidst some right notions many wild conceits. But when we meditate upon the prophecies that have been accomplished, the veil being removed, we no longer contemplate truth surrounded by mists and shadows; but we behold it cleared of its obscurities, and rendered bright and manifest by the illustration of its evidences. In looking forward we view, as it were, some faint glimmerings of a positive glory that is rising, but has not yet risen in any of its visible splendour; but in looking backward we perceive a number of prophetic rays gradually issuing from the fountain of light, and all tending to and meeting in one and the same point, and presenting a concentration of light, which none but the closed eye, or the eye that will not see, can avoid beholding.

The highest value should be set on the study of the prophecies, of those prophecies particularly that have been fulfilled, and the fulfilment of which is so evident in the historical events that have never been disputed. St. Peter says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation; for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

* 2 Peter, i. 19-21.

CHAPTER VIII.

SYMPTOMS OF THE APPROACHING DISSOLUTION OF THE JEWISH POLITY — THE COMING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST — THE PROPHECIES WITH REGARD TO TIME FULFILLED IN CHRIST — WITH REGARD TO PLACE — WITH REGARD TO PERSON, AS TO DIGNITY AND HUMILIATION — WITH REGARD TO CHARACTER — WITH REGARD TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS KINGDOM — THE PERSECUTION UNDER NERO — THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM — FURTHER PERSECUTIONS — THE CHURCH PROTECTED BY GOD, AND ITS ENEMIES PUNISHED — CHRISTIANITY THE RELIGION OF THE EMPIRE — REFLECTIONS.

SYMPTOMS OF THE APPROACHING DISSOLUTION OF THE JEWISH POLITY.

THE Jews weakened and distressed by foreign power, and still more by domestic dissensions, had now passed into a state of subjection most afflicting to their feelings and offensive to their pride; and the whole fabric of their civil and ecclesiastical polity was evidently tottering on its base, and evincing very strong symptoms of approaching dissolution. The sceptre had already to a certain degree departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet; and consequently the time was come when Shiloh

should appear. . The latter days of Daniel's 490 years were arrived, and the second temple erected by Zerubbabel after the captivity, and restored by Herod, was still standing. "The fourth beast" also, that was "dreadful, and terrible, and strong exceedingly;"* that is, the fourth great empire of the world, the Roman, which had subdued the Grecian and all the nations subject to the Grecian, and under which a new and everlasting kingdom was to be established by one to whom should be given universal dominion and glory, was in full strength and power. The spirit of prophecy, indeed, had ceased for about 400 years, and during that time no additional information had been dispensed relative to the Messiah and his kingdom. But there was now a confident and anxious expectation among the Jews that he was at hand; and the pious especially were waiting for the consolation of Israel, and looking for redemption in Jerusalem. There was, moreover, a very prevailing notion all over the East, that about this time a king was to arise out of Judea who should rule over the world; a notion derived from the prophecy of Daniel in particular, and probably from other parts of the Scriptures which, having

* Daniel, vii. 7.

been translated into Greek, had been read and studied by the wise and learned of the eastern nations.

How the promises of God, and the subsequent prophecies relative to the Messiah, those prophecies which were uttered previously to the death of David, were fulfilled in Christ has already been shewn. It is now to be made appear that the predictions of the successive prophets after David were also verified in Christ; together with those predictions of the Psalmist which were introduced among the former, as being immediately connected with their peculiar and identifying descriptions of the Messiah to come. And herein the economy of preparation will be found most interesting, and the exact accomplishment in Christ of its particular and various notices most remarkable.

THE COMING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Prophecy, as has been shewn, ceased in Israel with the notice that a messenger should come to prepare the way of the Messiah; and that this messenger would be Elijah the prophet; that is, one who should come in the spirit and power of Elijah, resembling him in the austerity of his life, in the sanctity of his soul, and in his zeal for the honour of God.

After a lapse of four centuries without any inspired teacher, and while all Israel and the East were expecting the Messiah and King; a voice was suddenly heard in the wilderness, crying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* This voice was that of John the Baptist, so called, because he baptized all that came unto him, confessing their sins. Israel was again blessed with the sound of inspiration; again favoured with a holy prophet; and the word of Malachi was verified in John. This forerunner of the Lord told the people plainly that he was not that prophet whom they expected to return to life, that he was not the same Elijah that was taken up into heaven, and that he was not the Christ, but his predicted messenger sent to prepare his way, and make his paths straight. He also assured them that the Christ was actually come, and standing among them, though not yet manifested to them; professing at the same time his own great inferiority and his subservient ministry. And he moreover testified that Jesus was the Son of God, on whom at his baptism the Spirit of God had descended and remained; and the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Thus

* Matthew, iii. 2.

proclaimed and baptized by his forerunner, and commissioned from above to begin his work, Christ manifested himself to Israel, and stood forth publicly as the Messiah, promised to the fathers, and foretold by the prophets.

THE PROPHECIES WITH REGARD TO TIME FULFILLED IN CHRIST.

It is now to be seen whether he were the Messiah or not, that is, whether the predictions of the last age of prophecy concerning the Messiah, including some of David's, were, like the former ones, accomplished in and by Jesus Christ of Nazareth; and first with regard to time. At the precise period marked out by Daniel, before the ruling and legislative power was wholly taken from Judah, before the second temple was destroyed, and while the Roman empire was at its highest pitch of glory, Christ was born; so that the time of his birth suited exactly with the predicted time of the Messiah's coming. The glory of the latter house was to be greater than that of the former; but how could this be, seeing that the temple of Solomon was much more magnificent than the other, and contained the ark and the divine symbols which the other wanted? The answer is, the latter house exceeded the former in

glory, because the Lord suddenly, at the appointed time however, came to his temple; and because it was adorned and beautified with the presence of Christ, who was the Messiah, the desire of all nations, the messenger of the covenant, the everlasting Son of the Father, the great High Priest of good things to come, the true Shechinah of the Divine majesty.

WITH REGARD TO PLACE.

Christ also was born in Bethlehem of Judea, out of which was to come a governor who should rule God's people Israel. The place, therefore, of his birth was the place whence the Jews expected, according to prophecy, their Messiah to arise. So that in Christ the predictions both with regard to time and place were accurately fulfilled.

WITH REGARD TO PERSON ; AS TO DIGNITY AND
HUMILIATION.

In Christ Jesus likewise were manifested those peculiarities which were to mark and identify the person of the Messiah, both with respect to his dignity and humiliation.

The voice of inspiration had foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, and that he would be Immanuel. Christ was con-

ceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. He was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God; and the word was made flesh, and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth, and the disciples beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.* Being conceived by the Holy Ghost who was divine, and born of the Virgin Mary who was human, he was both God and man; he was Immanuel, that is God with us, God manifest in the flesh. And it is only by admitting the union of the two natures in the Messiah, both of which natures Christ evidently possessed, that the prophecies, which in one place foretell him as God, and in another as man, can be reconciled.

Christ was a gift of God to man; for he was the child sent by the Father into the world to do his will; the son of the Highest given to die for our sins. The government is upon his shoulder, for "he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence;"† unto him all power in heaven and in earth is given,‡

* John, i. 1-14.

† Colossians, i. 18.

‡ Matthew, xxviii. 18.

and all judgment committed by the Father.* He was indeed "wonderful;" for besides his incomprehensible incarnation, there was in every thing he said and did an amazing greatness that filled all Israel with astonishment. He was "counsellor;" for he was the second person of the ever-blessed Trinity, "the whole three persons of which are co-eternal and co-equal;"† and being "in the bosom of the Father,"‡ he knew all the eternal purposes. He was "the mighty God;" for he and his Father were one,§ the same Lord of all things, the same King of heaven and earth, the same "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."|| He was "the everlasting Father," or author of everlasting salvation, the Father of all true believers, who being adopted into his church and family are children of his love.¶ And he was "the Prince of peace;" for he came down from heaven on an embassy of reconciliation, and made our peace with the Father through the blood of the cross.** In him the perpetuity of David's

* John, v. 22.

† Athanasian Creed.

‡ John, i. 18.

§ John, x. 30.

|| Rev. i. 8.

¶ Eph. i. 5.

** Col. i. 20.

throne is established; for the Son of David is a king that reigneth for ever;* and his kingdom, not a temporal, but a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom of grace and truth here, and of glory and felicity hereafter, is set up never to be destroyed. "The stone which was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet, and brake them in pieces, and became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth,"† represented the kingdom of Christ which, overturning the last great monarchy and prevailing against all its enemies, would spread itself throughout the world; and finally be delivered up to the Father, when all rule and all authority and power should be put down.‡

It was declared in the last age of prophecy that the Messiah was to be a King, a Priest, and a Prophet. All these offices were filled by Christ. This has already been shewn, there is, therefore, no occasion to prove it again.

It was foretold that the Messiah would be a Saviour. Under this representation he appears before us in a character the most interesting to fallen creatures, who have no righteousness to merit the favour of God, no power

* 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. † Dan. ii. 34, 35. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 24.

to make atonement for transgressions. "Fear not," said the angel to the shepherds, "for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."* And to this gratifying annunciation immediately succeeded the song of the heavenly host, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."†

Christ was rightly named Jesus; for he was indeed a Saviour, which that name imports; a name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. He came down from heaven to save us from our sins. And this salvation, the knowledge of which he taught by his word, he effected by his actions and sufferings, by fulfilling in our nature the perfect will of God, and thereby meriting for us his favour, and by suffering in our nature the severe punishment of God, due to all mankind, and thereby making in our stead satisfaction to his justice. St. Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;"‡ and "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."§ And

* Luke, ii. 10, 11.

† Ibid. ii. 14.

‡ 1 Timothy, i. 15.

§ Hebrews, vii. 25.

St. John writes, "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."*

Prophecy also declared that the Messiah would be a worker of miracles. And what were the works of Christ? Were they not miracles of the most wonderful nature and of transcendent mercy? miracles that shewed the divine authority of his mission, and the high dignity of his person; and which were wrought so instantaneously, so frequently, and so openly as to excite the utmost astonishment among the people, and cause them to exclaim, "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?† It was never so seen in Israel.‡ When Christ cometh," said they who were inclined to believe in him, "will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?§ What do we?" said his enemies, "for this man doeth many miracles; if we let him alone, all men will believe in him."||

All nature was subservient to the dominion of Christ; for he was the Creator and Sovereign of the world; "all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."¶ The sea was obedient to his word

* 1 John, iv. 14.

† Matthew, xiii. 54.

‡ Ibid. ix. 33.

§ John, vii. 31.

|| Ibid. xi. 47, 48.

¶ Ibid. i. 3.

— at his bidding the winds were still — at his command the grave rendered up its dead. At the sound of his voice the devils were driven from their holds, yielding to his authority and might, and confessing his Divinity. Omnipotent power was in him — miraculous virtue went out of him — and he “healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.”* He indeed verified the words of prophecy; for he opened the eyes of the blind, unstopped the ears of the deaf, and caused the lame to leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing.†

Again it was predicted that the Messiah would be the conqueror of death and the destruction of the grave — that he would ascend on high, leading captivity captive — and that he would receive of God gifts for men, in order that the Lord God might dwell among them. Christ was the plague of death and the destruction of the grave. He died indeed; but death had no dominion over him to corrupt his flesh. He was, it is true, deposited in the grave; but the grave had no power to detain him the Holy One of God. On the third day, the predicted time, he burst the bars of the tomb, and rising again shewed himself alive to his Disciples by many

* Matthew, iv. 23.

† Isaiah, xxxv. 5, 6.

infallible proofs. Forty days after his resurrection he ascended visibly and gloriously into heaven with that nature in which he had lived and suffered upon earth. The everlasting doors were opened to admit the Son of Man, accepted through obedience and made perfect through sufferings, to the throne of God, to the bosom of his Father. He then, having by virtue of his merits and atonement obtained of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, sent him to abide with his disciples, first, to forward their labours for the glory of God in the conversion of mankind with extraordinary gifts, and afterwards to become by means of his ordinary but increased influences the Comforter and Sanctifier of his church to the end of the world.—Thus we see how the prophetic descriptions relative to the dignity of the Messiah were manifested in Jesus Christ.

The voices, as it was before observed, that proclaimed the dignity, declared also the humiliation of the Messiah. The songs that sung his triumphs as a God were mingled with the strains that mourned his sorrows as a man. It is now to be inquired whether the predicted humiliation of the Messiah were fulfilled in Christ.

He was lineally descended from David, and was born at the time when the royal house was

minished and brought low ; and, considering the humble condition of Joseph and Mary, there was little promise of his becoming great. When he manifested himself to the people, he possessed no attractions of outward or worldly circumstances to draw men after him ; but presented himself to them as one of the lowliest in Israel, without wealth, power, or influence, without a single recommendation that could induce expectants of temporal glory to acknowledge him for their King. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."* "He was despised and rejected of men ;"† reproached as an impostor, vilified as a blasphemer, denounced as an agent of Beelzebub. He was indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ;"‡ for he "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself,"§ their malice, their persecutions, their false witness ; and wept over the rooted obduracy of man, and the dreadful punishment that awaited it. He was cut to the heart by the treachery of his own familiar friend, in whom he trusted, and who for thirty pieces of silver, the very predicted sum, betrayed him into the hands of his enemies ; and was wounded in the hour of his

* John, i. 11.

† Isaiah, liii. 3.

‡ Isaiah, liii. 3.

§ Hebrews, xii. 3.

trouble by the desertion of all his Apostles, and the threefold denial of one. He was the greatest sufferer that ever lived; for he bore the griefs, the sins, the punishment of all mankind; enduring for our guilt, in our stead, and for our restoration to God the severest agony that ever wrung the heart, and the most painful torture that ever tore the body of man. Never was any sorrow like unto his sorrow — never any form, never any visage so marred as his. As an innocent and patient lamb he was led to the slaughter, content, in order that we might be saved, to undergo without repining all the griefs and pains that malice in the hour of its triumph could inflict upon him. His enemies spit upon and buffeted him, beat him with scourges, crowned him with thorns, pierced his hands and his feet, and nailed his sacred limbs to the cross; and when the sufferings of a dying man might have excited feelings of commiseration in the coldest breast, they mocked him with the wagging of their heads, and the railing of their tongues. He was put to death under circumstances of the greatest ignominy; for he suffered the punishment of a slave and a culprit, and was crucified between two malefactors. They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall. The soldiers parted his garments among them, and cast lots

upon his vesture; and when they had broken the legs of the malefactors, they “came to Jesus; but finding that he was dead already, they brake not his legs;” whereby the Scripture was fulfilled, “A bone of him shall not be broken. One of the soldiers,” however, “with a spear pierced his side;” whereby also another Scripture was fulfilled, “They shall look on him whom they pierced.” It is moreover testified that he was buried by the rich; for Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man and a counsellor, and likewise a disciple of Jesus, having obtained leave of Pilate to take the body down from the cross, laid it in “a new sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid.”*

Thus were all the circumstances that were predicted of the Messiah respecting his humiliation, as well as his dignity, fulfilled in Christ.

WITH REGARD TO CHARACTER.

We come now to the inquiry whether the character of Christ answered the character given of the Messiah by prophecy.

We find upon examination that every thing the prophets said of the Messiah was true of Christ. He was in his whole nature sinless —

* Matthew, xxvii.; Mark, xv.; Luke, xxiii.; John, xix.

his heart never conceived evil — his lips never uttered a deceit — his life was never sullied by a transgression. He was zealous in the work which his Father had given him to do, and without fear declared the whole counsel that he brought down from heaven ; but his zeal was always united with the sincerest piety to God, and never separated from the warmest charity to man. He openly and boldly preached his doctrine of salvation ; but while he taught it earnestly and without compromise, he enforced it mildly and peaceably, courting attention, but avoiding strife. He vindicated himself, it is true, from calumny ; but while he repelled the indignity, and freely and awfully reprovèd the malice and wickedness of his enemies, he returned not evil for evil, nor hatred for their ill-will. “ When reviled, he reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”* He was meek and gentle, kind and affable, merciful and benevolent to all, patient under injuries, resigned under sufferings, condescending to the poor and lowly, solicitous to comfort the mourner, and heal the broken-hearted, ready to forgive offences, desirous to restore offenders,

* 1 Peter, ii. 23.

loving men more than they loved themselves, and more anxious to save souls than souls were to be saved. In short, he was excellence itself without spot or blemish; a man "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;"* adorned with all the graces of heaven, and exercising all the virtues that God could delight in, and angels look down upon with admiration.

WITH REGARD TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS KINGDOM.

Every thing, then, that the prophets foretold of the Messiah with regard to time, place, and person was most accurately and fully verified in Christ Jesus. There remains, however, another circumstance to be examined. Prophecy declared that the kingdom of the Messiah would be established upon earth, and would spread and flourish among the Gentiles, and finally embrace all the nations of the world, even the remnant of God's people Israel under David their prince. It is now, therefore, to be shewn how all this, as it regards the past, has been accomplished; and how, as it regards the future, it will be accomplished in the kingdom of Christ.

There were two principal reasons why Christ was to continue upon earth only for a limited

* Hebrews, vii. 26.

period ; first, because the victory which he was to gain for man was to be achieved and completed by his death ; and secondly, because until he had by his ascension opened the everlasting doors, and seated himself at the right hand of the Father, no intercession could be made for transgressors. As, therefore, he was to depart from among men when his hour was come, he selected in particular twelve Apostles who, filled in due time with the Holy Ghost, were to carry on his work, and extend his kingdom after his death and ascension. Judas Iscariot is, of course, to be excepted ; but the number of twelve was subsequently completed by the election of Matthias to his place and office.

Now when the Jews had succeeded in their wicked designs, and had destroyed the object of their hatred, they imagined that the new doctrine, the author of it being crucified, would die away ; and that the disciples, intimidated by the sufferings of their master, would not dare to uphold his cause and preach his religion. Nor would they have imagined a vain thing, had the doctrine been of men, or the disciples been left without power from above. But the work which Christ had wrought by his life and perfected by his death, was the work of God ; fruitless, therefore, was every attempt to destroy or prevail

against it; fallacious every hope that the ignominy and punishment of the cross would cause the counsel to perish.

Appearances, indeed, seemed at first to justify the expectations of these wicked husbandmen, who had risen up in conspiracy against their Lord and slain his son. For as soon as the deed of blood was perpetrated, the disciples were overwhelmed, not only with the heaviest sorrow, but with the gloomiest despondency. So little did they as yet comprehend the Scriptures with regard to the resurrection of Christ, and so totally were their hopes annihilated by his death, that the words of the women, assuring them that they had seen the Lord, "seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not."* And it was the sad and despairing observation of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus on the day of his resurrection, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."†

The hour, however, was at hand when the counsel of God in Christ Jesus, which malice and power imagined they had entirely suppressed, was to be preached loudly and boldly in the land by those agents, too, who were despised for their want of learning and their insignificance,

* Luke, xxiv. 11.

† Ibid. xxiv. 21.

and who, it was thought, would be deterred by the fear of undergoing the same cruel death as their Master's from teaching in his name. The time was coming when these lowly servants of the Lord Jesus were to assume a new character, when all inactivity and despondency being laid aside, they were with zeal and courage to preach the doctrine and defend the ignominy of the cross, and when, to the confusion of their enemies and the delight of some thousands in Israel, they were to confirm their word with signs following.

Christ, while living, had told them that he would send them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who should guide them into all truth, teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them; and had assured them that they should bear witness of him in faithfully recording the truth, because they had been with him from the beginning; and that when they were brought unto the synagogues, and unto the magistrates and powers, the Holy Ghost would teach them in the same hour what they ought to say. And after his death, just before his ascension, he informed them that they would be baptized with the Holy Ghost in a few days, and that, having received power by this baptism,

they would be witnesses unto him both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

Now it had been foretold many centuries before, that God would in the days of the great demonstration pour out his Spirit upon all flesh;† and this prophecy accords exactly with the promise of Christ to his Apostles. The prophecy, however, did not point out the precise number of years that would elapse before its fulfilment; but the promise, agreeing with it in signification, was fixed and determinate as to time, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."‡ The verity, therefore, of Christ's words was almost immediately to be ascertained; and whether he were a true or false prophet was shortly to be decided by a test of his own appointing. It is to be seen, then, what did actually in a few days take place.

On the fortieth day after his resurrection Christ ascended gloriously and visibly into heaven to take his seat at the right hand of God as Intercessor for sinners, and to receive of the Father gifts for men. Ten days after this, it being then the feast of Pentecost when vast

* Acts, i. 8.

† Joel, ii. 28.

‡ Acts, i. 5.

numbers were come up from all parts to Jerusalem, while the Apostles "were all with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."*

Now what was the manifest effect of this descent of the Holy Ghost? and how was the promise of Christ evidently fulfilled? The mere declaration of the Apostles that they had received a special gift from heaven was as nothing without proofs; and it was necessary that these proofs should consist of some open and extraordinary display of power; of that power, too, which was manifestly derived from God. What the Apostles were by birth and calling was well known in Israel. That they were men without learning, without wealth, without influence, without power, men totally destitute of those talents and of that ingenuity requisite to carry on any great design, was evident to all. How, then, could they attempt with any the least prospect

* Acts, ii. 1-4.

of success to build up the church of Christ? And what fear could their enemies entertain from the operation of instruments so weak in themselves, and so unequal to any vast or comprehensive project? Humanly speaking, there was no probability that the counsel of Christ would prevail, or that his disciples would venture to assert it.

But observe them immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them. Did they merely assure the people that they were inspired? Did they give no other evidence of their authority than the publication of their divine commission? Look at them when they began to preach the Gospel of Christ—hear their words, consider their works—and it will be perceived that they did not advance empty pretensions, nor prove the truth of their doctrine by the wisdom and power of man.

On a sudden these poor uneducated men, who had lately shewn so much sorrow and despondency, and betrayed so great timidity and irresolution, and were totally incapable of attracting the notice of the people by any thing that could excite pleasure or astonishment, were heard boldly and openly preaching the name of Jesus, and preaching it, too, to Jews out of every nation in its own tongue, to Parthians,

and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians.*

In addition to this gift of languages and of inspiration thus suddenly and publicly displayed, these witnesses of Christ were endued with the power of working miracles. Peter on the day of Pentecost, speaking as the Spirit gave him utterance, preached with so great effect that 3000 persons, admitting the force of this extraordinary evidence, and yielding to the conviction of their senses, were immediately converted to the faith. After this, as signs and wonders confirmed the doctrine of the Apostles, great accessions were made to the church; for, says the Evangelist, "The Lord added unto the church daily such as should be saved."†

The Apostles at first confined their labours to the house of Israel; for as yet no commission had been given by the Spirit for commencing the task of preaching Christ to the Gentiles. But when, notwithstanding all the efforts of the rulers of the people to suppress

* Acts, ii. 9-11.

† Ibid. ii. 47.

the faith, the church was regularly appointed and firmly fixed in the land, James the Less being constituted Bishop of Jerusalem; and when on this account the association of the Apostles in the same place was no longer necessary, the Divine will was made known in a special vision to Peter, that the door of faith should be opened to the Gentiles. The time was now arrived when these servants of Christ Jesus were to go into all the world, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The decree had gone forth that the news of Christ's kingdom should be carried beyond Jordan and the Sea, that not only Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, but the uttermost parts of the earth should break forth into joy, and sing together at the good tidings of salvation.

Saul, a bitter persecutor of the church, who had consented to the death of Stephen, and done much evil to the saints at Jerusalem, was miraculously converted on his way to Damascus, and particularly chosen to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The sun of righteousness that first arose in the favoured land of God, the land of ancient promise, of holy prophecy, and of mighty miracles, now piercing the surrounding mist, and shedding his glorious

beams upon the long-benighted nations, gave light to them that walked in darkness, and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace. The voice of the messengers that had cried unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Your God reigneth! now proclaimed the same glad tidings to the cities of the Gentiles. The message of peace and salvation was heard by numbers with amazement and received with gladness. At the sound of grace the idolater forsook his image, and bowed the knee to Jesus. He who boasted of his learning, and thought himself wise, on receiving the intelligencé of the Gospel confessed his ignorance, and acknowledged that there was no wisdom like that which was deemed the foolishness of preaching. They who had used curious arts, practising upon the credulity of the people by means of sorcery and magic, struck with the truths of God and the miracles that confirmed them, renounced their ungodly craft, and brought their books together, and committed them publicly to the flames. And the sinner, melted by the gracious promise of mercy upon repentance and faith, and comforted by the information that a Divine Saviour had made atonement for the guilty, and animated with

the hope and prospect of everlasting life, forsook with a contrite soul the error of his ways, and casting off the old man with his deeds, "put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."*

The propagators of the Gospel were threatened, beaten, imprisoned, and put to death; but enmity and power, though persecution and torture were their means, were unable to accomplish their end. Vain was every effort to suppress the labours and break the spirit of men inspired by the Holy Ghost, and working the work of God—vain every device to allure or intimidate hearts animated by the prospect of an everlasting reward—vain every attempt to silence tongues crying out in all directions, Hosanna to the Son of David! The effects of their preaching, unaccompanied as it was by any artificial aid or secular authority, were truly astonishing, and to be accounted for upon no other ground than that of Divine agency. God was evidently with his witnesses, carrying on his great work of redemption and peace through their instrumentality. The Holy Ghost, the promised Comforter, had not only descended upon the servants of the Lord Jesus, and filled

* Ephesians, iv. 24.

them with knowledge, and comfort, and sanctification; but had also supplied them with extraordinary means and mighty powers to prove and confirm the truth of God in Christ both to Jews and Gentiles.

The promise of Christ, therefore, was fulfilled according to his own limitation, “not many days hence”—and the prophecy that God would in the days of the great demonstration pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, had now begun its course of accomplishment; and advanced so rapidly therein, that within the space of forty years the faith of Jesus was received by multitudes in all parts of the Roman world.

The Apostles travelled into divers and distant countries, preaching the Gospel everywhere, and planting churches in numerous places from the remote India to the utmost bounds of the west;—and most, if not all of them, except St. John, and perhaps St. Matthew, at last laid down their lives for the testimony which they held.

In our consideration of the progress of Christianity the words of Christ should be borne in mind, first, with respect to the certain advancement and ultimate success of the Gospel in the world; and secondly, with respect to

the difficulties which it would have to 'encounter from the evil passions and false opinions of men. He spake thus to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* And to the eleven he said after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."†

While, however, he assured his disciples of the triumph of his kingdom, of his providential protection of his church till time should be no more, of his victory over the world, and of the blessedness of those who should endure unto the end, he informed them that in the world they should have tribulation—that in the prosecution of their duty they would have to drink of his cup of affliction, and to be baptized with his baptism of calamity—that they would be hated of all men for his name's sake, and be delivered unto councils, and be scourged in the synagogues, and be put to

* Matthew, xvi. 18.

† Ibid. xxviii. 19, 20.

death—that false Christs and false prophets would arise to deceive many—and that his advent and the preaching of the Gospel, though tending to produce peace, would be made by evil men the occasion of public persecutions and domestic animosities.

It is necessary to carry these sayings in remembrance; for without this guard upon our meditations we may fall into offence because Christianity, which is maintained to be the Divine word supported by the Divine Spirit, has not converted all nations, or because after a lapse of so many centuries it has spread itself over so limited a portion of the globe. It should likewise be considered that, as the Christian system was a progressive one through various preparations from the beginning of the world to the coming of Christ, so is it a progressive system through the fulfilment of prophecies from the coming of Christ to the end of the world. Many prophecies are yet to be accomplished before “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”* The economy of preparation is still going on, not for the revelation of grace, for that is past; but for the revelation

* Isaiah, xi. 9.

of further glories of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and for the grand revelation of his glory and the glory of his saints in heaven.

The church of Christ consisted at first of a very small number; and they were men of no secular authority, power, or influence whatsoever, despised for their mean birth and on account of their coming out of Galilee, ridiculed for their want of education, and hated for their attachment to the memory and doctrines of their crucified Master. It has been seen, however, that through the instrumentality of these humble witnesses, supported by the Holy Ghost, the word of God grew and prevailed; and that by their extraordinary and persevering labours churches were established in the space of less than forty years in all parts of the Roman world.

The Jews, who had killed the Lord of life, were the first persecutors of his unoffending followers; and wheresoever the Gospel was preached among the Gentiles, they were the chief instigators of the people against its holy witnesses. But their enmity, though it occasionally wrought the torture of individuals, had not only no effect in suppressing the great body of Christians; but excited a stronger ardour than ever in the cause of Christ, and tended to raise up multitudes to

embrace the faith of men who exhibited so much holiness in their lives, and so glorious a triumph in their deaths.

THE PERSECUTION UNDER NERO.

It pleased the Almighty to withhold the arm of the Emperors of the Roman world, until such time as the Gospel was established throughout their extensive dominions. At length the boldness of Christ's followers in exposing the false doctrines, and reproving the profane superstitions of heathenism, awakened the jealousy and indignation of the throne. The sanguinary Nero issued an edict against them; and a violent persecution commenced throughout the empire. The holy preachers of the doctrine of Christ were assailed as blasphemers of the Gods and enemies of the State. They found no protection in their innocence nor in the laws. Power went forth with great fury to destroy them; and thousands were put to the most cruel deaths that hatred and ingenuity could devise. Numbers were condemned to be crucified—others were impaled alive—others were thrown to be devoured by wild beasts—and many besmeared with pitch were burnt as torches in the city and in the gardens of the imperial palace. The emperor himself took delight in ordering these

cruelties, and beholding] these nocturnal illuminations. Were it not a fact recorded in history, one could scarcely conceive it possible that a human being should find diversion in seeing such tortures executed on his fellow-creatures.

But the tribulation of those days, bitter as it was, neither terrified the hearts, nor silenced the voices of the brethren. They expected to drink of the cup of affliction, for their Saviour told them that such would be their portion; but they looked forward to a glorious reward, and full of faith in his name and trust in his word, they rather sought than fled from martyrdom, being convinced that when "absent from the body," they would "be present with the Lord."* Persecution, though it immolated its victims to the Gods, tended only to draw more closely the bond of union among Christians, to strengthen and extend the cause of their glorified Master, and to confirm their resolution to "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering."† The holiness of their lives, the strictness of their devotions, the excellence of their preaching, the harmlessness of their conduct, and the love which they entertained for one another, and

* 2 Corinthians, v. 8.

† Hebrews, x. 23.

exercised towards all, had strongly recommended their doctrine to the world; and when it was perceived that, in addition to all this, they were not only ready to die, but did actually in multitudes submit with unparalleled constancy and fortitude to the most dreadful tortures for the testimony of Jesus, there was even in the days of this grievous tribulation a very considerable press into the kingdom of heaven. The voices of suffering martyrs confessed their Lord and their God; and the triumphs of their expiring breath proclaimed to the conviction of numbers, that they had sealed the truth with their blood. Could not the master of all the world with all his absolute power, with all his cruel edicts, with all the numerous executions of his tyranny and wrath, put down a religion, in defence of which not an arm, not a sword was raised? No, mighty as was his authority, vast as were his means, vindictive as was his spirit, he entirely failed in his endeavours to bring to nought the word of Jesus. He raged and laboured much; but although for two years his instruments of death were dripping with blood, he could not shake from their faith, nor extirpate from the earth, the unresisting witnesses of the cross.

What, then, is the inference? It is this, that Christianity was the counsel and work of

God which he had ordained should prosper; and that its success, with the greatest possible secular power raised to destroy it, and without any the least secular resistance made to support it, is an evidence to mankind that it was upheld and advanced in the world by Divine might. Had the faith been shielded in the beginning by the arm of human greatness, or had it owed its prosperity to any temporal influence or force, men might have questioned, especially in after-ages, whether it had not originated in human device; but growing and prevailing, as it did, in its infancy without any protection and support from the powers of the earth, and under the charge of instruments apparently the most weak and insufficient, there can be no doubt whence it proceeded — and the mind is brought to this unavoidable conclusion, that it must have come to nought, had it not been dispensed by the authority, and sustained by the providence of God.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

Not long after the cessation of this persecution under Nero, and two years after his death, a circumstance of the highest importance to Christianity took place, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Christ had pre-

dicted this event, and had declared that it would come to pass within a certain period. "There be some of them that stand here," said he to his disciples, "which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."* Nearly forty years after his departure into heaven, when St. John, and some others who had heard the word from Christ himself, were living, the fury of God was poured out upon the Jews; and all the bitter woes which Christ had predicted were accomplished. The fulfilment of their Lord's words was a cause of great joy and triumph to the Christians. It was a strong confirmation of the truth of the Gospel and of the grounds of their faith; and it supplied them with another powerful evidence wherewith to convince and convert the world. It enabled them to say to their hearers, Did not Christ foretell these days of vengeance that were to come within a limited period upon the Jews, days which their great Lawgiver Moses also predicted?† Did he not declare that there would be great distress in the land and wrath upon the people; that they would perish by the edge of the sword; that they would be led away captive into all nations; that Jerusalem would

* Mark, ix. 1.

† Deuteronomy, xxviii.

be compassed with armies, and trodden down by the Gentiles, and those Gentiles the Romans; and that with regard to the temple and the city, there should not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down? And have not all these things been literally fulfilled, and fulfilled at the predicted time? Again, was it not Christ's exhortation to those who should believe in his name, "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh; then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto?"* And did not the Jewish Christians that were in Jerusalem, remembering this caution, and taking advantage of the unexpected and providential retreat of the Roman army from before the walls, flee out of the city to the mountains in the neighbourhood, and thereby escape destruction? Does not this establish the prophetic verity of Christ, and confirm the truths which he preached, and the faith for which we contend? Open your eyes, then, and see what great things the Lord has done for his church, and what terrible wrath he has executed upon

* Luke, xxi. 20, 21

his enemies. Hear the Jews crying out, "His blood be on us and on our children"*—contemplate the pouring out of the vials of divine vengeance on their heads in the days of the great tribulation—and renouncing your prejudices and your sins, your gross vanities and your profane superstitions, enter into the kingdom of Christ, and be saved.

The prophecy of Daniel concerning the destruction of Jerusalem harmonizes exactly with the prophecy of Christ concerning the same event, especially with regard to time. Had the Jewish commonwealth continued, and the city and sanctuary stood for a century, or even less, after Christ's death, both prophecies would have failed; and Christians would not only have wanted a powerful evidence to confirm their cause, but would have been encountered by an irresistible evidence against it. In the failure of the predictions enemies would have had a strong ground of triumph, friends would have been offended and have fallen away, and the edifice of Christianity would have been shaken to its foundation. But that which had been determined was at the predicted time poured out upon the desolate; and this literal accomplish-

* Matthew, xxvii. 25.

ment of the word of God, while it brought great joy and triumph to the church, occasioned a vast accession of converts to the faith.

FURTHER PERSECUTIONS.

From the destruction of Jerusalem to the reign of Constantine the Great, Christians underwent many dreadful persecutions; though it pleased the Almighty to give them occasional intervals of rest, during which they multiplied exceedingly. They preached, it is true, without fear and without ceasing the doctrines of their blessed Master; but they intermeddled not with the affairs of the State, nor excited any strifes and contentions among the people. They lived holily and unblamably, exercising universal love, and observing with the utmost strictness the duties which they taught. They would not, indeed, make any compromise of their principles for the sake of personal comfort or through apprehension of personal danger; neither would they cease to expose the fallacy, or to express their abhorrence of the heathen superstitions; but in their apologies for themselves and their faith, in their refutations of error, and in their reprehensions of vice, they were actuated by an earnest desire to benefit man for the glory of God. Their whole conduct evinced a display

of zeal and firmness on the one hand, and a temper of charity and peace on the other.

Their virtues, however, could not exempt them from persecution. The heathen emperors, with very few exceptions, were violent enemies of Christianity, and with unparalleled cruelty made havoc of the church. The barbarities of Nero were acted over and over again by several of his successors, and ingenuity itself was exhausted in inventing fresh instruments of torture. The truth of the relation we have of the various modes in which Christians were tortured and put to death during these persecutions might be doubted, had not subsequent ages produced, and did not the annals of our own country furnish, evidences of similar barbarities. The fact is, as history has taught us, that there is no cruelty, however extreme, which intolerance, and especially religious intolerance, may not be brought to perpetrate.

THE CHURCH PROTECTED BY GOD, AND ITS ENEMIES
PUNISHED.

Under the six seals of the book that was opened by the Lamb the kings of the earth stood up; and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed; but in their devices to extirpate the truth they ima-

gined a vain thing ; in their attempts to destroy the church they raged, and persecuted, and killed to no purpose. For he, who under the first seal was represented as sitting upon a white horse, with a bow in his hand, and a crown upon his head, and as going forth conquering and to conquer ; * even the Lamb who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, protected and upheld his church amidst all its dangers and sufferings, and making war for the faithful gained signal victories over their enemies. Under all their cruel afflictions Christians were supported by the prospect of a glorious reward in heaven ; and when they saw not only their own cause prosper under persecution, but also both their Jewish and Heathen adversaries enduring the most dreadful calamities, killing and destroying one another, and executing upon themselves the severe judgments of God, they took courage and were comforted, and felt more and more convinced that the kingdoms of this world would become the kingdoms of their Lord and his Christ. Great indeed was the number of those who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held ; but greater still were the multitudes of their enemies who

* Revelations, vi. 2.

perished by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; so that, although the persecutions were bitter, much more bitter was the vengeance. "The hand of the Lord" was "known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies, and the slain of the Lord were many."*

CHRISTIANITY THE RELIGION OF THE EMPIRE.

At length in the beginning of the fourth century Christianity triumphed over heathenism; and at the command of Constantine the Great, who had embraced the faith, the power of heathen Rome was no more. The religion of Christ became the religion of the empire, and the church, delivered from persecution, had rest from all its enemies. Then began the fulfilment of the Scripture which said, "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers."† And again, "So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider."‡

* Isaiah, lxvi. 14-16.

† Ibid. xlix. 23.

‡ Ibid. lii. 15.

REFLECTIONS.

In our review of Christianity from the actual demonstration of the Saviour, we observe that it was preached to the Jews as the new covenant of God promised of old ; and preached by one who had no temporal power or authority, and whose object it was to advance it in the world without any secular or fictitious aids. We next hear it promulged to the Jews, and afterwards to the Gentiles, by those who were as humble in condition, and possessed as little temporal influence as their Master. Notwithstanding every difficulty that power, prejudice, and enmity could raise up to obstruct its progress, we see it prevail among the nations, gaining strength the more it is oppressed, and increasing in the number of its professors the more it is persecuted. Its simple truth, supported by the Divine Spirit, and vindicated by signs and wonders, finds its way into the heart, and establishes itself in the understanding. We perceive its witnesses, both during the existence and after the cessation of miraculous power, renouncing every worldly good for the sake of Christ, suffering the most excruciating tortures in defence of his word, and even pressing forward with joy to receive the crown of martyrdom. In the

course of time the rich, the accomplished, and the learned take up the cross of Christ, rejoicing in its ignominy, asserting its atonement, and advocating its glory. And at length we behold the Gospel, at the beginning of the fourth century, and after a series of trials and conflicts that must have overwhelmed a merely human cause, triumphing over all its enemies, and, protected by the arm of power, taking its ascendant station as the religion of the empire.

If all this is not to be considered as the counsel and work of God, connected as it is with the economy of preparation from the beginning, what events in the history of mankind can be deemed the acts and effects of Divine Providence? But it is the Christian's joy and glory to believe that Christ was the Son of God, his Gospel the word of God, and its success in the world the work of God. In the enlargement of the church against the most violent opposition of cruelty and power, he contemplates the mighty agency of the Holy Spirit, and in the triumphs of the cross over spiritual wickedness and human persecution he beholds the victories of the Lamb in the war which he waged for his people.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PURITY OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH—THE RISE OF SCHISMS AND DIVISIONS—A TRUE CHURCH PRESERVED IN THE WORLD—THE FAITH EMBRACED BY MANY FROM INTERESTED MOTIVES—THE TEMPORARY PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH—THE JUDGMENTS ON CHRISTIAN ROME—THE RISE OF MAHOMET—THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF HIS CHURCH VINDICATED—THE AFFLICTED CONDITION OF THE CHURCH DURING THE DARK AGES—THE REFORMATION—THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND—REFLECTIONS.

THE PURITY OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

DURING the earliest ages of Christianity, and amidst the most cruel persecutions, the highest purity both of faith and practice was observed by the church; and to the preservation of this purity the fiery trial, no doubt, very materially contributed. The primitive Christians were burning and shining lights to the world around them. And they were content in the hour of trial to lay down their lives for the testimony which they held, encouraged and supported by the words of Jesus; "Whosoever will save his

life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it."* And again, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."†

THE RISE OF SCHISMS AND DIVISIONS.

But heresies and schisms began even in the Apostles' time to disturb the peace and hurt the interests of the church. Some of the Jewish Christians, still retaining their attachment to the Mosaic law; and not properly distinguishing between that part of it which was incorporated with the new covenant, and that part which was given for temporary purposes, and was to pass away when the substance which it represented was come, were desirous of observing their ancient ceremonies in conjunction with the faith, and even of imposing them upon the Gentiles who had embraced Christianity. Hence arose an unhappy separation which interrupted the harmony of the brethren, and rent the body of

* Matthew, xvi. 25.

† John, xiv. 1-3.

Christ; nor had the solemn decision of the council at Jerusalem the effect of settling this question to the satisfaction of the Jewish converts, or of allaying altogether the irritation that had been excited. Some of the Gentile Christians on the other hand, whose minds were still infected with the poison of the Oriental philosophy, mixed up their old fancies with the simplicity of the Gospel, and entangled it with the subtleties of heathen superstition.

From these two sources originated the numerous divisions which were so prejudicial to the interests of Christianity in the earlier ages; and which in all periods of its existence have furnished its adversaries with so powerful an argument against it. It is not intended to enter into the subject of these divisions, nor to discuss the various questions relative to the heresies and erroneous interpretations of the word of God, that have all along been agitated to the great detriment of the church of Christ. Suffice it on this point to observe that, numerous as have been the absurdities and wild the vagrancies of human opinion, the Gospel is in no way chargeable with the aberrations of the human understanding, nor with the uncharitable and often rancorous accusations with which religious parties have assailed one another. Revealed truth

is plain and simple, requiring indeed faith in declared mysteries, but disallowing the authority of human reason to build upon it any fancies or inventions of its own. When men choose to encumber it with new devices, or suffer their imaginations to refine upon its simplicity, or to trespass beyond the prescribed limits, the cause of error lies not in it but in them, and theirs only is the reproach for whatever mischief may ensue. It must ever be lamented that Christians cannot be brought "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;"* and that, considering the infirmities of human nature and the fallibility of the human judgment, they have frequently been so unwilling to "forbear one another in love."†

But when we look at man as he is, an imperfect being; and when we reflect upon the various causes that tend to prevent a complete coincidence and concurrence of opinion in all things, we must not be surprised that truth itself is sometimes perverted, or that mankind will not, especially in abstruse points, view things and doctrines exactly in the same light. While a sense of duty forbids our compromising any article of faith which, in our conscience after a

* Ephesians, iv. 3.

† Hebrews, iv. 2.

candid and patient examination, we believe to be true, or our conceding to any tenets which, in our conscience after a trial of them by the words of Scripture, we believe to be erroneous, charity urges us to exercise forbearance towards those whose honest and sincere convictions, accompanied by a spirit of peace and goodwill, differ from our own. The true Christian temper, which, while it is firm, is always gentle, is the best agent to promote concord among those who have one common interest and one common end to pursue, and to bring them, though not perhaps entirely, yet nearer to the same mind and the same judgment.

A TRUE CHURCH PRESERVED IN THE WORLD.

Amidst, however, all the strange interpretations of Christians, and all the bold liberties they have taken with the texts of Scripture, and all the heats and contentions that have arisen among them, God has preserved a true and holy church in the world. The Gospel, supported by the Divine Spirit, has combated successfully with error; and its main doctrines, those which relate to the blessed Trinity, to the meritorious atonement of the Son of God for the sake and in the stead of sinners, and to the descent and abiding of the Holy Ghost for the sanctification

and comfort of mankind, have ever been maintained by the great body of Christian witnesses.

It has been seen with what extraordinary fortitude and constancy the primitive Christians sustained the fiery ordeal of persecution, choosing to undergo the tortures of martyrdom rather than surrender their faith and renounce their God. The words of Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna and disciple of St. John, are written in golden characters in the Christian church, and his firm and undaunted spirit animated thousands of holy martyrs in the day of trial. When urged to deny Christ, and thereby escape the cruel death that awaited him, he exclaimed, "Fourscore and six years have I served him, and he has never done me an injury; shall I blaspheme my God and Saviour?"

During, however, these troublous times, when the heathen Emperors persecuted the church, some, terrified at the tortures which they saw inflicted on the brethren, and dreading that the like evil would fall upon themselves, forsook the cross which they had taken up, and renounced the faith to save their lives. But notwithstanding the heresies of the presumptuous and the renunciations of the timid, the church, while under affliction, was composed of holy men who followed the steps of their blessed

Master, and lived in conformity with the religion which they preached. They were swayed by no temporal motive — they sought no temporal interests — nay, their determination “not to know any thing save Jesus Christ and him crucified” was both an absolute surrender of all worldly good, and a voluntary exposure of their lives to troubles and sufferings. Considering the total absence of all secular lures whatsoever, and the privations, distresses, and severities that attended a Christian course, the purity of the church in the season of tribulation is easily to be accounted for, as those only would become and continue members of it, who were content upon principle to forsake all and follow Christ, and were ready to die martyrs, that he might be magnified, and they themselves received up into glory. Adversity is a strong test of principle and of faith.

THE FAITH EMBRACED BY MANY FROM INTERESTED
MOTIVES.

When Christianity became the religion of the empire, the church was brought by the providence of God into a state of great prosperity. The Emperor of the world afforded it his powerful protection, and his people in all parts of his dominions flowed into it in multitudes. Kings

were its nursing fathers, and their queens its nursing mothers, and many Gentiles came to its light.

Too soon, however, an evil of vast magnitude grew up in its very bosom. Numbers embraced the faith because it was the faith of the throne, and because it led the way to wealth and honours. They became Christians, not from any conviction of the truth, or out of regard to Christ, but from motives of interest, and with a view to gratify their pride and ambition. Hence those numerous corruptions that have since infected the church, and those gross departures from primitive integrity which have brought reproach upon the Christian name. But for these mischiefs, not arising out of Christianity, but introduced into the profession of it, prophecy had prepared the world; the fulfilment of which we are enabled to trace and contemplate.

THE TEMPORARY PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH.

The lamb opened the seventh seal, “and there was silence in heaven about the space of half-an-hour;” * that is, the church enjoyed for a few years an extraordinary degree of tran-

* Revelations, viii. 1.

quillity. It had triumphed over its great enemy, Heathen idolatry ; and after all the storms that had assailed it, now rested awhile in prosperity and peace. By this temporary respite time was given for the sealing of the servants of God, that is, for the admission of multitudes to the faith by the mark or seal of baptism.

THE JUDGMENTS ON CHRISTIAN ROME.

This silence in heaven, however, was in less than twenty years broken by the sounding of the first trumpet, which signified the commencement of a series of new troubles to the empire and the church. Successive trumpets were sounded by the angels of God ; and there issued a denunciation of woes represented under the figurative terms of fire, and hail, and blood, of wormwood and thick darkness, of devouring locusts and destroying angels. And these woes did actually take place. For during this period great disorders and commotions arose in the world. Fierce and intestine wars disturbed the peace and broke the strength of Christian Rome. The northern nations poured down upon the empire in immense numbers, and deluged its various provinces with blood. Rome was besieged and taken more than once by these barbarous hordes, and spoiled, and burnt. Her vast riches were

seized by the conquerors; many of her citizens were carried away captive, her imperial sceptre was broken for ever; and all her ensigns of authority were trampled in the dust. Many Christian churches were demolished; and the greatest fury was poured out upon the priests and bishops for the sake of plunder. On all sides were heard cries of misery mingled with the shouts of conquest.

THE RISE OF MAHOMET.

In the beginning of the seventh century a fresh evil arose in the world. The impostor Mahomet preached his new religion; and in the course of rather more than twenty years established by means of the sword his false doctrines and a powerful dominion over the whole of Arabia; whence his followers issued in swarms, like locusts, "to hurt, not the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only those men which had not the seal of God in their foreheads;"* and with desolation and slaughter to torment men as with the sting of scorpions. In the invasions and conquests of the Saracens, in their intolerance of all faiths but their own, in their excessive hatred of Jews

* Revelations, ix. 4.

and Christians, and in the numerous destructions of their sword, is to be viewed the fulfilment of one of the prophetic denunciations. Upon the latter part of the above passage from the Revelations Bishop Newton observes, that by the expression, "only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads," is meant, "those who are not the true servants of God, but are corrupt and idolatrous Christians;" and then adds, "Now it appears from history that in those countries of Asia, Africa, and Europe where the Saracens extended their conquests, the Christians were generally guilty of idolatry in the worshipping of saints, if not of images; and it was the pretence of Mahomet and his followers to chastise them for it, and to re-establish the unity of the Godhead. The parts which remained most free from the general infection were Savoy, Piedmont, and the southern parts of France, which were afterwards the habitation and nurseries of the Waldenses and Albigenses; and it is very memorable that, when the Saracens approached these parts, they were defeated with great slaughter in several engagements."

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE TRIALS AND VISITATIONS
OF HIS CHURCH VINDICATED.

Now it may be thought strange by some that God should, after so many preparations

for it from the beginning, establish his church upon earth by his only-begotten Son, and then suffer it to undergo for nearly three centuries the fierce and fiery trial of persecution—and again, that soon after the Heathen Roman empire became Christian, he should bring upon it so many terrible and destructive woes. But the ways of Providence will always admit of vindication.

In the first place it is to be considered that Christ forewarned his followers of the temporal evils which they would have to endure for his name's sake, and in the task of propagating his Gospel. All the tribulations, therefore, that they underwent were a fulfilment of his word. The persecutions which they met with, and the pains and griefs to which they were put, were trials of their faith and constancy, and means afforded them both of glorifying their God and Saviour, and of attaining to the reward of suffering for righteousness' sake. The success of the Christian cause under so many and grievous calamities was an irresistible evidence that it was protected and upheld by the Divine hand; and while it proved a strong inducement to those that were without to enter into the church, it occasioned the highest consolation to the faithful, and an increased resolution on their part to go on their way rejoicing.

In the second place it is to be considered that the woes brought upon the Roman empire, when converted to Christianity, were poured out in consequence of corruption. Great and serious evils had been introduced into the church, and these evils multiplied with time. Christians had lamentably departed from the integrity of the primitive faith and practice. They assailed one another with angry contentions and disputes. In the heat of controversy they forgot the temper, the character, and the duties of their profession. They ran into all kinds of religious excesses and superstitions, embarrassing the simplicity of the Gospel with wild and visionary notions, bewildering themselves and the world with speculative interpretations of the mysteries of their religion, and resorting to a variety of forms, severities, and delusions unknown to the Apostles, and unwarranted by Scripture. When all the world was against it God brought his church through trouble and persecution, and caused it to triumph over both Jewish and Heathen enmity, to shew that it was established by his counsel and preserved by his providence. When it was exalted to a prosperous condition he smote it with successive strokes of his wrath to correct it for its abuse of his mercies, to punish it for

its departure from the truth, and to evidence to the faithful the fulfilment of the word which he had spoken by his prophet.

It is to be observed, likewise, that the very judgments brought upon the Christian Roman empire were made by his mercy productive of benefit to the church and to the world. The true Christians, those who remained uncontaminated by the prevailing corruptions, were thereby strengthened in their faith and confirmed in their holy resolutions, perceiving that in all these things the Divine word was accomplished. And the people of the north, who rushed like a tempest upon the empire, and laid it waste, became by their conquests acquainted with the Gospel; and thus the truth found its way into nations hitherto ignorant of Christ and of the redemption of the world by precious blood. Hence both the permissions and visitations of God stand fully justified.

THE AFFLICTED CONDITION OF THE CHURCH DURING THE
DARK AGES.

Before the mystery of God should be finished, it was predicted that the church would be in a most afflicted condition; and this was the case during the dark ages that ensued;

when the Scriptures were as a sealed book ; when religious subtleties of opinion rent the body of Christ, and excited cruel hostilities ; when mistaken piety ran into a thousand extravagances ; and when zeal unaccompanied by knowledge and heated by passion, forgot the duties of moderation and charity, and became arbitrary and intolerant. An enumeration and discussion of the errors and delusions of these ages would occupy so large a space as to exceed the limits assigned to this treatise. Though time and the light that has sprung up in the world have not entirely dispersed them ; yet it is hoped that they are gradually dying away, and that as the word of God becomes more widely disseminated, more generally studied, and better known and understood, they will be altogether removed. And every good Christian will devoutly pray that the hour may not be far distant when, all the errors that have been engrafted on the stock of truth being renounced, an approximation of religious sentiment and feeling will take place among those, who are of the same mind and the same judgment with regard to the main articles of the Christian faith.

THE REFORMATION.

In the sixteenth century the Reformation began, though the seeds of it had been sown long before. The book of the Scriptures was opened, and men were invited to read and study them, and draw from them alone, as the only unerring source of truth, their principles of faith and their rules of conduct. The spirit of inquiry spread rapidly around. The Scriptures, containing the words of eternal life, and translated into different languages, were sought after with avidity; and men, desirous of learning the truth, the means of doing which were now afforded them, became by the efforts and labours of their own minds acquainted with the everlasting Gospel; perusing it in the hour of their retirement from the cares and vexations of the world, deriving from it strength and resolution in the time of temptation, and extracting from its soothing pages consolation and peace in the season of sorrow, of sickness, and of death.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

From this Reformation arose the Established Church of England. Our wise and pious reformers, actuated by a love of disseminating

the truth, by a desire of advancing the honour of their Lord and their God, and by a temper of charity and goodwill to man, proceeded with a zeal, a knowledge, and a diligence truly surprising in perfecting the happy work in which they had engaged. Setting aside all undue prejudices, and looking to the account which they would have to give at the last day, they received all those doctrines of the Roman Catholic persuasion and of the Reformed Churches abroad, which were true according to the plain word of Scripture, and rejected such only as had not this word for their authority and warrant. In all their interpretations, appointments, and rites they referred to the principles and practice of the primitive Christians, wisely passing by the ages of darkness and delusion, and ascending in search of their model to those times when Christianity flourished in all its purity.

REFLECTIONS.

Under our Church Establishment, so scriptural in its doctrines, so pure in its worship, so wise in its regulations, and so tolerant in its spirit, we have enjoyed a degree of peace, of happiness, and of freedom from persecution and suffering unknown before the joyful event

of the Reformation. The piety, the beauty, the charity, the simple yet inspiring energy of its Liturgy have been universally acknowledged and admired. In all its prayers and petitions there is a true Christian spirit mingled with a fervent devotion and a generous benevolence. It enjoins its members to pray for themselves, for others, for their enemies, for all sorts and conditions of men, to let their sentiments and feelings of charity spread over the whole world, and to forbear in love when they cannot agree in opinion.

This Church Establishment has descended a blessing to us—may it descend a blessing to our children and our children's children till time shall be no more. We utter this prayer without the slightest ill-will towards those who dissent from us. We allow them the right, which we claim ourselves, to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience—yet we cannot admit that the assumption of this right, either as regards ourselves or them, is any justification of opinion; or that it is any excuse for errors that have been engrafted on the understanding from a want of an honest and unprejudiced inquiry, and of fervent prayer to God to be led into all truth. Harsh judgment and asperity of language will never bring

us nearer to a point of union. They will not convert an adversary into a friend. They will not induce the sheep, that are feeding near us in their own meadows and drinking at their own streams, at any time to enter in and partake of the pastures and waters of our Zion. While, therefore, we maintain and uphold with firmness the principles of our faith (and no one will respect us for abandoning our honest and sincere convictions) we should carefully avoid all expressions of reproach, and every thing that may tend to widen the breach which the spirit of Christian truth and benevolence would gladly close. The mandate that is issued to condemn and proscribe has no authority in the word of God—the sword that is drawn to persecute and destroy is no weapon of the Christian armoury. We disallow every feeling that is not awakened by Christian love and Christian duty united, or that would cause us to forget that we are brethren, born to the same state of difficulty and probation, in need of one another's advice, of one another's aid, and journeying through the same vale of tears to the same everlasting home.

CHAPTER X.

PROPHECIES CONCERNING FUTURE EVENTS TO BE CAUTIOUSLY TREATED OF—PROPHECIES WITH RESPECT TO THE JEWS—WITH RESPECT TO THE GENTILES—WITH RESPECT TO THE MILLENNIUM—WITH RESPECT TO THE LOOSING OF SATAN—WITH RESPECT TO THE END OF THE WORLD—CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

PROPHECIES CONCERNING FUTURE EVENTS TO BE CAUTIOUSLY TREATED OF.

IN the preceding review of the counsel of redemption we have passed through all ages and generations down to the present period. The subject is now to be pursued into future time.

When we examine the predictions of the Scriptures relative to past events, we have in the accomplishment of God's word a clear view of the truth, and demonstrative evidence convincing to the understanding. The connexion of the antecedent prophecies with the subsequent facts enables us to form certain conclusions without the least difficulty or doubt. But when we come to the consideration of the prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled, we are to enter upon it with

extreme caution and diffidence; not distrusting the completion of the word of God as to the predicted facts; but guarding ourselves against indulging vain and presumptuous speculations not only with regard to those facts themselves, but also to the manner in which they are to be brought to pass.

Yet while we carefully abstain from assuming the character of prophets by rash ventures of private opinion; we are not to draw back from contemplating those Scriptures which assert that certain events will take place in the church and in the world, and which were written, not only to confirm us in the true faith and instruct us in righteousness; but also to give us joy and consolation in the prospects, partly obscure and partly clear, of what is to come. They who reflect upon the past, and view in accomplished prophecy the sure and connected operations of God, must feel a deep interest in considering the future, and in endeavouring to learn, as far as they are permitted, not his secret purposes, but the positive declarations of his word. While there is presumption in trying to lift up the veil, there is none in meditating upon the events which will, we are assured, be manifested when that veil shall be removed by the hand of time.

Observing, therefore, the utmost caution as

we go along, and treading with the most wary steps, as fearful of trespassing upon holy ground, we proceed to shew what events the Scriptures declare will be brought to pass hereafter; omitting the consideration of those around which there yet hangs so much obscurity, that it may be deemed prudent to forbear hazarding an opinion which, however true in the main, might deviate into some speculative interpretations, and confining the inquiry to such as are plainly and positively foretold, and accurately and minutely described by Scripture itself.

PROPHECIES WITH RESPECT TO THE JEWS.

With respect to the Jews the word of Scripture seems plain and explicit. It appears to us to teach that they will in the latter days of the world be restored to their native land and be converted to Christ. The following are some of the testimonies of the prophets on this point.

“ It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamoth, and from the isles of the sea; and he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts

of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth"* —“and it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.”† “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And David my servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd; they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes and do them.”‡ —“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant.”§ —“The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim; afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.” || — “And I will pour

* Isaiah, xi. 11, 12.

† Ibid. xxvii. 13.

‡ Ezek. xxxvii. 21-24. § Ibid. xxxvii. 26. || Hos. iii. 4, 5.

upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."*

Hence it seems to be plainly declared, that the Jews would be gathered out of all countries, and be restored to the land of their fathers;—that they would become a righteous people obeying the everlasting covenant under David their prince, that is, the Gospel of truth under Christ their king—that they would receive a plentiful effusion of the divine grace—that they would believe in him whom their fathers pierced—and that they would with deep humiliation lament over his griefs and sufferings, and implore forgiveness for their infidelity and sins.

When we consider how wonderfully the Jews have been preserved during the long period of their exile—how singularly, notwithstanding their dispersion among all nations, they have retained their character, their prejudices, and even their distinguishing features—and how remarkably they are existing at the present day

* Zechariah, xii. 10.

in as great numbers as ever, though for upwards of seventeen centuries and a half they have had neither country nor government of their own — we cannot but be convinced more and more of the truth of prophecy, and of the certainty of its future fulfilment in their restoration and conversion. They were the natural branches, but were broken off because of unbelief; assured, however, we are, and St. Paul testifies to this truth, that they will one day be grafted in again. “If,” says he, “the fall of the Jews be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?”* The times and seasons are in God’s own hands; and though we know not the exact period when this great event will take place, when the Jews shall be brought to sing their Hosannas to the Son of David in Jerusalem; yet we are persuaded that the hour of their restoration and conversion is appointed, and that the prediction will be accomplished. The opinion here advanced is, as it will be observed, in favour of the construction that the Jews will actually be restored to their native land; differing from that of others, who conceive that the words of prophecy are to be accepted as signi-

* Romans, xi. 12.

fying only their restoration in some remarkable manner to the divine favour. In holding the former opinion, which adheres to the literal meaning, it is not presumed to say that the latter, which adopts the mystical signification, is incorrect. So long as it is granted, though the literal construction be rejected, that some signal manifestation in behalf of the Jews, by which they will be brought to a conspicuous state of elevation, and at which the world will be astonished, is intended by the expressions of prophecy; a manifestation connected, yet not identical with their conversion,—and so long as the question of their actual restoration to their native land is not made to rest upon the improbability of such an event; an argument that can have no weight with those who are conversant with the extraordinary changes and occurrences, which the history of nations, especially of that of the Jews, records to have taken place in the world—it would answer no useful purpose to enter into a disputation upon a point that time only can elucidate; especially as, although the interpretation is not altogether the same, the integrity of the prophecies is not hereby questioned, nor the certainty of their fulfilment denied.

PROPHECIES WITH RESPECT TO THE GENTILES.

Another important event is next to be considered, namely, the coming in of the Gentiles in multitudes to the Church of Christ.

It was the early prediction of Jacob that unto Shiloh should the gathering of the people be; and the flowing in of the Gentiles to the kingdom of the Messiah was the frequent song of prophecy. Now we know that vast numbers of them have embraced the faith, and that at the present period of the world the most civilized nations of the earth are by profession Christians. But the fulness of the Gentiles' coming in is a future event; and we learn that in point of time it will be coincident with the restoration and conversion of the Jews. "I would not, brethren," said St. Paul, "that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."* The Gentiles, it seems, are to be the means under Providence of bringing in the Jews, and the converted Jews are to become the powerful instruments of God to bring in the unconverted Jews, and those Gentiles who shall

* Romans, xi. 25.

be then unbelieving; for, "thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders."* It shall come to pass that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory; and I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them," that is, those who have ventured to their own land from their several dispersions, "unto the nations that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles; and they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations."†

It will indeed be a happy circumstance for the world, and a glorious triumph to Christianity, when the forces of the Gentiles shall come in, and when the Jews, the once favoured people of Jehovah, shall be brought to acknowledge Christ for their Lord and their God, whom their father Abraham saw afar off. The consideration that these are predicted as future events entirely removes the weight of that objection which is raised against Christianity, because it as yet

* Isaiah, xlix. 22.

† Ibid. lxvi. 18-20.

occupies only a limited space upon earth. The word of God plainly teaches that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ; but that they will not become such till several more ages and generations shall have passed away.

The triumphs of the Gospel are in progress. It is travelling onward in the greatness of divine strength—its messengers are on the mountains of Heathenism—the sound of good tidings is swelling on the breeze—and the expectant watchmen are already beginning to lift up their voice. The soldiers of Christ are on the march, bearing his sacred banner, and bearing it, not in the spirit of wrath and on a crusade of blood, but in love, mercy, and good-will; that the deluded nations of the earth, seeing its glory and rejoicing in its salvation, may burst their bonds asunder, and stand forth in all the manliness of Christian liberty.

If we fully and firmly believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, we shall allow no arguments, however ingeniously put or powerfully maintained; no gloomy pictures of obstacles to be overcome, as though they were impassable mountains; no plausible representations of the improbabilities of success, as though they were unassailable fortresses, to shake our confidence

in revealed truth, or disturb our convictions of its certain and ultimate accomplishment. Standing on the foundation which the Almighty himself has laid, and relying implicitly on his veracity, we shall no more doubt that all existing impediments, strong and gigantic as they are, will be made to give way before the power of Evangelical truth, than we now do that the walls of Jericho fell down before the armies of the living God.

The Lord of hosts has assured us that the kingdom of his Son will grow and prevail, and that it will at last embrace all the nations of the earth. Has it not made its way into various parts of the globe, dissipating darkness and scattering blessings in its progress? Has it not surmounted obstacles as great and formidable as any that now exist in the world? Has it not succeeded when every appearance, and every strength and every accumulation of improbabilities were against it? Has it not with the force of truth, and not with the hand of violence, hurled idols from their base, and superstition from its throne? Has it not dissolved the potent spell of sorcery, quelled the fierce spirit of fanaticism, quenched the dire flames that blazed on the altars of ungodliness; and shivered to atoms the cruel knife of immolation? Yes, this it has done; and the world

looked on and wondered. This it has done ; and the world beheld its triumphs and rejoiced. This it has done ; and why should it not do the like again ? What is there in the nature of man that renders his understanding more impracticable, his disposition more stubborn, his prejudices more inveterate, his attachment to his divinities and his creed more firm and unassailable, than they were centuries ago in lands where gross darkness covered the people ? We know of no existing belief more contrary to the truth than those false notions which once prevailed—we have heard of no existing difficulties more insuperable than those superstitious barriers which were once erected—in countries that are now Christians.

But supposing we err in this respect, we would ask, What powers, what prejudices, what obstacles, make them as mighty, as deep, as vast as you will, can resist the Son of God travelling in the greatness of his strength ? What armies, human or spiritual, will not quail and tremble, and surrender before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, when he goes forth conquering and to conquer ? Is any thing too hard for the Lord ? Or has the Lord spoken, and shall it not come to pass ?

The time, we doubt not, will arrive when

the sacred waters, falsely so called, shall no more close upon the helpless infant and the decrepit sufferer—when the grave shall never again open to receive the living mourner—when the hideous flames of the funeral pile shall no longer glare in the fair face of heaven—when the strong holds of caste, broken into and destroyed by the all-subduing genius of the Gospel, shall lie in ruinous heaps—and when the idol-wheels, shattered and trampled in the dust, shall never again be rolled in barbarous solemnity over the devoted victims of superstition. The time, we doubt not, will arrive when all nations shall stretch out their hands unto God—when every idol, shorn of his glory and forsaken by his worshippers shall fall, Dagon-like, before the presence of the great Immanuel—when every false creed shall surrender to the faith of the mighty Deliverer of the world—when the Heathen, the Mahomedan, and the Jew, converted from their errors, shall join in Hosannas to the Son of David—and when every dark place of the earth shall behold the rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon it, and rejoice in the visit of the day-spring from on high.

These will be the triumphs of Christianity—these the glories of the Eternal Lamb. Let the

incredulous deride this assertion — let them call it a vain and idle prophecy — let them class it among the dreams of folly, among the romances of a wild imagination, or among the extravagances of a visionary enthusiasm — these nevertheless will be the triumphs of Christianity ; these the glories of the Eternal Lamb ; triumphs and glories as certain as that the word of God is true. And while we have that word for our strong hold and our rock, we will confidently look forward to the future trophies of our holy religion, unmoved by the prophecies, the scorn, or the incredulity of man.

We must not, however, be so sanguine in our hopes, as to imagine that we shall live to see the time when the forces of the Gentiles shall come in, and glorify God for the knowledge of salvation. The present generation can do no more than prepare the soil and sow the seed for harvests in time to come. It must be patient, not expecting too much, not attempting to force production, but content to do its own appointed work, content to root out what weeds it can from the uncultivated places, and infuse therein the elements of future fertility. This is its proper task, its peculiar office ; and after-ages will look back with gratitude and pay their tribute of praise to those, out of whose labours

have arisen the fruits which they have been brought to taste and enjoy.

PROPHECY WITH RESPECT TO THE MILLENNIUM.

It is taught that when the mystery shall be fulfilled, and the Lamb be triumphant over his enemies, the thousand years will commence when Satan shall be cast into the bottomless pit; and be remarkably restrained in his power to torment, and limited in his means to deceive the nations; and during which the stone that smote the image will become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth,* and "the kingdom" of Christ "under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."†

It will be prudent to avoid any conjectural speculations with regard to the nature, character, and circumstances of the millennium; lest the truth be embarrassed by some fond conceits of the imagination, and the mysteries of God be trespassed upon by an uncertain interpretation of private opinion. Suffice it to observe generally, without entering into particulars, or rashly trying to lift up the veil, that

* Daniel, ii. 35.

† Ibid. vii. 27.

it appears to represent a vast extension of the kingdom of Christ when, Jewish and Heathen prejudices being overcome, he shall reign over the nations in all those visible and manifest improvements both religious and moral, which will be the consequence of this extension. By these improvements, if not by some signal providences to be then displayed, Satan will be restrained in his power to do hurt, and the church of Christ be elevated to a higher degree than ever of prosperity and happiness, which will last for a thousand years, that is, for a considerable length of time.

It may appear to some who reflect upon the limited extent of Christ's kingdom at the present day, and who consider what evils and dissensions exist among Christians, that we are indulging visionary notions, and looking forward to a state of things, of the accomplishment of which a right view of human nature will not justify the expectation. But we maintain that, whatsoever difficulties may seem to lie in the way, the word of God must and will be brought to pass. With God all things are possible, and as his word with regard to the past has been in every instance fulfilled, what reason have we to suppose that it will fail in any thing with regard to the future ?

PROPHECY WITH RESPECT TO THE LOOSING OF SATAN.

When the thousand years shall have expired, or that term, whatsoever it be, of the church's prosperity and happiness, "Satan," we are informed, "shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth."* But this new apostacy will continue but a short space; for the fire of God will come down out of heaven, and he will consume the enemies that compass the camp of the saints, and cast the devil into the lake of fire and brimstone.† Hereby, we conceive, is represented, first, a lamentable but temporary relapse of the nations into infidelity and sin; and secondly, a terrible vengeance of God to be executed on Satan and on those who shall have suffered themselves to be deceived by him.

PROPHECY WITH RESPECT TO THE END OF THE WORLD.

Then Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,"‡ encircled with the

* Revelations, xx. 7, 8.

† Ibid. xx. 9, 10.

‡ 1 Thessalonians, iv. 16.

glory of the Eternal Majesty, and attended by myriads of the celestial host. Then will come the general resurrection and the last judgment, when the everlasting destiny of all mankind will be decided. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."* At the word of the Almighty this vast fabric of creation will vanish into nothing. In the last wreck of things this whole scene of man's transgression, of Satan's triumphs, of Christ's redemption, and of God's severe judgments and providential mercies will be dissolved for ever. "Then cometh the end," says St. Paul, "when" Christ "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power; for he must reign," as mediatorial king, "till he hath put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; for he hath put all things under his feet; but when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that

* 2 Peter, iii. 10.

put all things under him, that God may be all in all ;”* communicating as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost inconceivable and endless felicity to the redeemed, for whom there will no longer be any occasion for a mediator.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

This brief exposition is now brought to a conclusion. Therein it has been shewn how “ God made known unto ” the world “ the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him ; in whom also ” believers “ have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated,” or foreordained to it, “ according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”†

It is hoped that what was said in the commencement of this treatise is now manifest, namely, that the scheme of human redemption is much more ancient, vast, and comprehensive than is apparent to superficial observation ; and

* 1 Corinthians, xv. 24–28.

† Ephesians, i. 9–11.

that it bears evident marks of being, not a contrivance of human ingenuity, but a work of divine wisdom; not a design first formed in the midst of time by an artful adventurer from interested motives and for political or secular purposes, but a grand economy of grace devised by the Almighty before time was for the salvation of the world, embracing all ages while time endures, and destined to arrive at the height of its perfection when time shall be no more.

It has been evinced that it was a counsel which had for its object the triumphs of grace over sin, and the perfection of grace in glory — a counsel consisting of promises, prophecies, and revelations, of special providences furthering the divine purposes, of remarkable preparations for the coming of the Redeemer, of acts performed and sufferings undergone by him for the sake and in the stead of the whole world, and of all that man is required to believe and obliged to do in order to salvation. This counsel has been traced from eternity past, as having been fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. It has been followed in its operations from the promise of God to Adam, through his subsequent promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the Mosaic revelation itself, and through

the numerous predictions of the prophets down to the advent of the Redeemer, and the establishment of his kingdom upon earth. And the trials, persecutions, and successes of the Christian church through the following ages to the present period having been considered, the same counsel has been accompanied by faith into future times, when that church shall prosper exceedingly, and into eternal ages when its glory shall be complete in the happiness of the redeemed, and in the full revelation of the mysteries of God from the beginning.

In this harmonious and wonderfully-connected design of human redemption what can we discern but the counsels and operations of the Almighty? When we contemplate all that he has done for mankind—when we perceive him lifting up his hand to stay the ruin which Satan had begun—when we see him preparing a way for his merciful purpose by supernatural providences, by signs and wonders, and by typical and prophetic intimations; intimations growing more clear and particular and replete with interest as the grand manifestation drew nigh—when we behold him putting his angels in motion to usher his only-begotten Son into the world, and to usher him back again into heaven—when we consider him as redeeming lost man-

kind by the sinless obedience and atoning blood of a divine Saviour, and establishing his kingdom of grace upon earth for their blessing and salvation — and when we reflect upon the glory reserved for those who live and die in the Lord Jesus—we are lost in astonishment that any one, with such evidences before him, should refuse to confess Christ in the words of Thomas “ My Lord and my God ! ”

All the evidences for the truth of Christianity are necessary to its entire confirmation. Each has its peculiar value, its peculiar strength ; and every one is as a link in the chain that cannot be removed without detriment to the whole. We cannot spare one of them ; we need them all ; we have them all ; and their combination forms a glorious unity. The fulfilment of prophecy, on which the Apostles so strongly and frequently dwelt, is a species of proof that has in all ages brought rich triumphs to Christianity ; for such fulfilment is a standing miracle ; a miracle which time, laden with fresh accomplishments, renders more and more apparent ; a miracle which the reason of mankind may always contemplate, and which their examination may always bring close to their mental view. Hereby our faith is so fortified as to defy all the efforts of men and spiritual wickedness to over-

throw it; for when we see events that have been foretold all minutely and exactly fulfilled; events of different kinds and of various character all brought to pass in a regular train and order, at the very places and at the very times predicted, all connected together as branches belonging to the same stock, and all tending to one common point, to the accomplishment of one great design, to the achievement of one mighty triumph; we have before us such an accumulated force of evidence to convince the mind; such a concentration of light to disclose the highways of faith to the vision of reason, that we cannot resist the power that presses upon us, nor refuse to behold the glory of God's grace thus conspicuously manifested in his economy of man's redemption.

In the Law we discern strong notices of the Gospel—in the Gospel we see completed the types and shadows of the Law. In the predictions of the prophets we read the history of Christ—in the history of Christ we recognize the predictions of the prophets. There exists the strictest alliance, the most complete harmony between the two covenants; between the testament proclaimed to Israel from Mount Sinai, and the testament published to the same Israel in Sion. In the one redemption was prefigured

and predicted—in the other it was manifested and fulfilled.

In the beginning it was declared that the Redeemer should suffer, that his heel should be bruised by the serpent. It was shadowed in the Law that his blood should be an offering for sin. The sufferings of the Redeemer were the frequent theme of the prophets; and it was plainly disclosed that out of his sufferings would arise blessing and salvation to transgressors.

The Redeemer came, even Christ Jesus our Lord, and he was bruised unto death; bruised, that by his stripes we might be healed; that by his blood we might be cleansed, that by his chastisement our peace might be made. Without suffering Christ could not have fulfilled the Scriptures—without suffering the Messiah could not have been known—without suffering he could not have borne our griefs, nor carried our sorrows, nor been wounded for our transgressions. The witnesses of Christ shewed how he had established by his afflictions and bruises his pretensions to the character of the promised Redeemer, the predicted Messiah. They spoke in gladness of the travail of his soul. They gloried in the ignominy of his cross. They rejoiced in the victory of his death. They proclaimed aloud the good tidings of peace through

the shedding of his precious blood. They exhorted all to have faith in the great captain of salvation made perfect through sufferings; and the truth of what they testified and declared, they confirmed with signs following, and sealed with their blood.

We know that men of the highest virtue, of the most exemplary piety, and of the most rare and cultivated understandings have exerted their mighty powers in defence and furtherance of the Gospel and of the whole word of God — men, who have not contented themselves with a vague superficial knowledge of the Scriptures; but who have drunk deeply at the fountain of truth, who with patient and laborious research have investigated the sacred oracles of the Almighty, and who have risen from their inquiries confirmed in their belief, convinced of the divine origin of their faith, and ready to undergo any tribulations rather than renounce their Saviour and their God — and these have been not a few solitary individuals, but a cloud of witnesses, a host of worthies in the church of Christ.

Having on our side these holy advocates of the cross, whose characters we venerate, whose memories we revere, and whose height and depth and compass of divine knowledge we hold in admiration, we feel an increased assurance

that our faith is true, and are content against all contradiction to go on our way believing and rejoicing; believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and divine Saviour of the world; and rejoicing in the prospect of the exaltation of the just to the assembly of heaven, to the scene of "the gathering together in one all things in Christ," where the whole counsel of God will be finished and perfected in the consummation of the glory and happiness of the redeemed.

THE END.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY JAMES MOYES, CASTLE STREET,
LEICESTER SQUARE.

